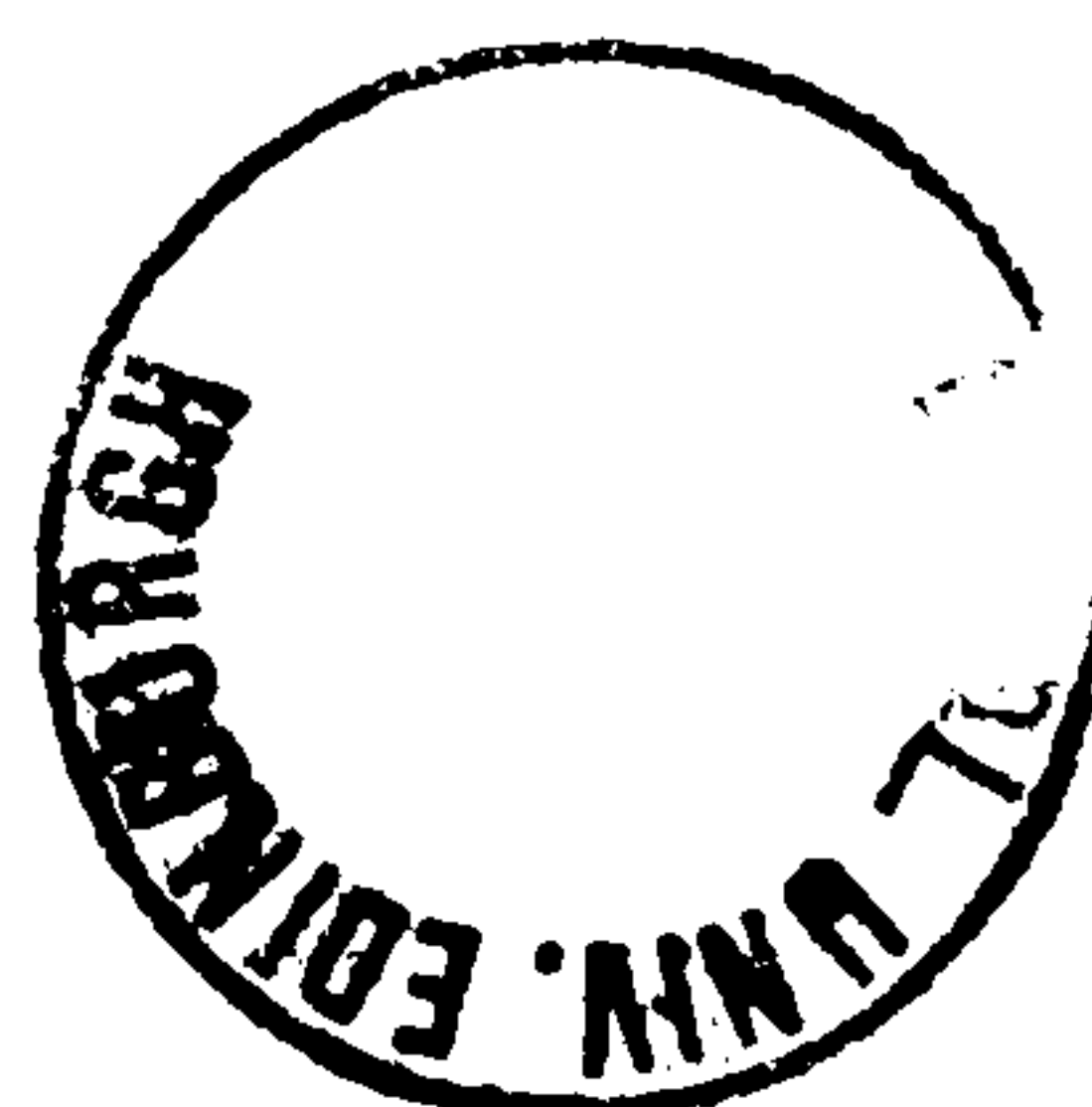


**From Sacred Text to Religious Text: An Intellectual History of the Impact
of Erasmian Lower Criticism on Dogma as a Contribution to the English
Enlightenment and the Victorian Crisis of Faith**

By

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I pledge~~that this thesis~~~~has been composed~~ exclusively by the candidate

A religious belief in verbal inspiration gave the Christian Bible its sacred text status within the matrix of the Church. The *lower*, or textual criticism, first practiced outside the sanction of the Church by Erasmus and developed further by non-Trinitarians initially, offered the first significant direct challenge to this belief in the early modern period. This, the dissertation argues, was the proper beginning, phenomenologically speaking, of the process of desacralization.

Moreover, it is argued that the desacralizing role of the lower criticism was further manifested when it was discovered that certain theologically significant passages, perceived by those in the Erasmian school to have resulted from later interpolation into the text of Scripture, illegitimately lent support to dogmas such as the Trinity, the deity of Christ and the virgin birth. The practice of lower criticism set in motion, well before the arrival of the higher criticism, a rather significant awakening of a historical consciousness about the developmental stages of the N.T. text, which in later recensions reflected a more full-blown orthodox expression of christological themes. The role that the lower criticism played in introducing this historical consciousness has not been readily acknowledged by either historians or practitioners of the discipline of lower criticism.

The dissertation argues that this is because of an ideological framing of the historical details of the discipline in development. This ideological component and the historical circumstances prompting it are brought into relief revealing why two schools arose during the English Enlightenment and carried on into the Victorian era, responding to the data of text criticism in two directions: one interpreting the data as affecting dogma, the other interpreting the data as not affecting dogma. In answering why this came about the dissertation helps to explain how the quest for the historical text culminated in the quest for the historical Jesus.

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Abbreviations

BWDN	<i>Biographisch Woordenboek der Nederland</i>
CE	<i>Correspondence of Erasmus</i>
CHB	<i>Cambridge History of the Bible</i>
COE	<i>Contemporaries of Erasmus</i>
CWE	<i>Collected Works of Erasmus</i>
DNB	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>
LCC	<i>Library of Christian Classics</i>
LW	<i>Luther's Works</i>
NCE	<i>New Catholic Encyclopedia</i>

N.B. I have employed the "Author-Date System" of documentation found in *The Chicago Manual of Style* 13th ed. University of Chicago Press, 1982, as my working model for composition. Because, however, the Introduction was quite literally the last chapter of this dissertation composed, and because the bibliography was already in place, and finally because most of the sources referred to in the Introduction are modern rather than historical in nature, I have opted to give fairly full citations of sources found in the text of the Introduction and to omit placing these sources in the Bibliography. This should also allow the reader to gain a quicker grasp of the arguments and data at this early stage of the dissertation without needing to refer to the Bibliography.

Also, because so many of the book reviews in the eighteenth and nineteenth century journal literature are unascribed I have included these reviews under the name of the author of the book reviewed.

I would have...loved to bring before my readers the great figures of...Erasmus...Grotius, Wetstein...Tischendorf...and other eminent translators, editors and humanists. But it was useless to explore this domain except in a separate volume relating the history, not of New Testament criticism in general, but textual criticism in particular.

--F.C. Conybeare, *History of New Testament Criticism* 1910, vi.

I. Introduction

I am intrigued by the question of the response of the community whose [sacred] text has been "critically edited." Of course when this is done, it no longer is a sacred text, because it is no longer the text which the community has always regarded as sacred; it is a scholars' text.

--Paul Ricoeur "The 'Sacred' Text and the Community" in
W.D. O'Flaherty, ed. *The Critical Study of Sacred Texts*
1979, p. 271.

A. Preliminary Remarks

Toward the close of the last century there appeared a popular work treating the history of the then yet emerging post-Enlightenment science of textual criticism as practised on the sacred text of the Christian Greek New Testament. It was written by the premier English authority in the field at the time, one who had yet to earn his knighthood, but who had attained a German Ph.D. from Halle and who at the time was curator of the Department of Manuscripts at the British Museum. If the proof of how well one has mastered their material is measured by how simply one is able to communicate a specialist's subject to non-initiates, Frederic George Kenyon's *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts* (1895) is proof that the author was, indeed, in command of the terrain.¹

¹Kenyon: "It is the object of this volume to present, within a moderate compass and as clearly as possible, the means we have for knowing that...our Bible, as we have it to-day, represents as closely as may be the actual words used by the writers of the sacred books.... [A]ny intelligent reader, without any knowledge of either Greek or Hebrew, can learn enough to understand the processes of criticism..." (1895:4).

On the third page of the opening chapter of this classic² he addressed what he knew would be the nagging concern of his readers: to what extent had criticism discovered defects in the authoritative, sacred text of the Christian Church? He soon had his readership comforted and sharing a collective sigh of relief. Putting the case as harshly as he could, he first admitted that "Besides the larger discrepancies...there is scarcely a verse in which there is not some variation of phrase in some copies. No one can say that these additions or omissions or alterations are matters of mere indifference" (3). On a happier note, however, he went on to reassuringly affirm

It is true (and it cannot be too emphatically stated) that none of the fundamental truths of Christianity rests on passages of which the genuineness is doubtful (3-4).

Put another way, none of the textual variants affects the received dogmas of orthodoxy. The parenthetical content in this quote is a wonderful clue to the theme of this dissertation. Why did Kenyon feel the need to be "emphatic" on this point? It is because the very assertion he wishes to make had been in dispute since the English Enlightenment and was far from settled in Kenyon's own day.

Kenyon's conviction was stated in good faith and with earnestness, no doubt. Nevertheless, the assertion that no essential dogma--particularly of christological significance--was threatened by the textual variants discovered by the end of the nineteenth century, was, in fact, an ideological assertion. It was a perspective nearly unique to the British (mostly English) approach to the discipline of lower criticism within the European context. In Kenyon's case it had been derived from the most formidable theoretical work produced in

²It would see a fifth edition published posthumously in 1958, remaining in print continuously for sixty-three years.

England on the subject during the Victorian era, Fenton John Anthony Hort's *Introduction to the New Testament in the Original Greek* (1881)³

Here Kenyon was deliberately countering the German method which by the early nineteenth century had as one of its tenets the conviction that a major source of corruption in the Greek manuscripts of the N.T. was the result of scribes altering the text for theological, or dogmatic purposes. Griesbach had stated this in clear terms:

When there are many variant readings in one place, that reading which more than the others manifestly favours the dogmas of the orthodox is deservedly regarded as suspicious (Johann Jakob Griesbach, *Novum Testamentum Graece* 1796:62).⁴

In response to Griesbach's canon Hort had precluded the very possibility of the orthodox having corrupted the text by countering with an ideological assertion that had a pedigree extending all the way back to Richard Bentley in the eighteenth century (and it manifested yet again in Hort's own century in the person of Samuel Tregelles). Hort affirmed the following:

It will not be out of place to add here a distinct expression of our belief that even among the numerous unquestioned spurious readings of the New Testament there are no signs of deliberate falsifications of the text for dogmatic purposes (Hort 1881:282).

³Cf. also p. 10 where Kenyon is even more careful to reinforce his conviction under the heading "Textual Errors do not Endanger Doctrine." Here he maintains further: "One word of warning, already referred to, must be emphasised in conclusion. No fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith rests on a disputed reading" (Kenyon 1895:10). In order to further bolster his claim Kenyon then refers in a footnote to Hort's *Introduction* where Hort offers a comment in the same vein.

⁴Earlier still Wettstein had formulated a similar canon: "Of two various readings that which seems the more orthodox is not to be forthwith preferred" (Hulbert-Powell *John James Wettstein 1693-1754* 1937:118).

As will be demonstrated hereafter, this is an unwarranted assertion--a kind of dogma itself.⁵ It will be one of the purposes of this dissertation to establish that this is so while offering an *Ideologiekritik* of what I will hereafter refer to as the *ideology of harmless engagement*, that is, the conviction that the textual variants within the Greek N.T. manuscripts never affects essential dogma within the Christian belief system.

That this ideology prevails right to the present can be witnessed in a recent up-dated edition of an important French *Introduction* to the discipline of lower criticism first published in 1933 but recently brought back to life by Cambridge University Press (1991). Here Léon Vaganay carries on the tradition into the twentieth century:

The great majority of the divergences in readings are to do with details of spelling, grammar or style and do not affect in any way the meaning of the text.... Some are particularly interesting either because they involve a considerable portion of the text or because of their theological significance. In the latter case, though, as would be expected [!], the substance of Christian doctrine is never affected... (Léon Vaganay *An Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism* 2nd ed. 1991:3).⁶

⁵On the dogmatic temperament of the Victorians see Houghton's *The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870*, particularly chapter six, titled "Dogmatism," (1957:137-160).

⁶Metzger also admits minor doctrinal alterations, but such a concession is almost a barrier to getting at what is really at stake by, in almost red-herring fashion, leaving the impression that variants were of no serious dogmatic consequence (Metzger *The Text of the New Testament* 3rd ed. 1992:201-206). On this score note also that in tones not unlike those of Kenyon, Metzger is quick to calm his audience: "Lest the foregoing examples of alterations should give the impression that scribes were altogether wilful and capricious in transmitting ancient copies of the New Testament, it ought to be noted that other evidence points to the careful and painstaking work on the part of many faithful copyists" (206). The Alands, on the other hand, admit that there was editorial activity in the pre-Nicene era that was not "primarily motivated" by philological concerns. It was "prompted rather by ecclesiastical or theological interests." It was revised "not so much with a concern for establishing or restoring the original text as for determining the 'best' text from a particular perspective" (Aland/Aland *The Text*

Such ideological judgements/assertions are not confined to manuals treating the prolegomena of text critical theory and practice. This ideology looms larger in certain specific contexts, namely, contemporary Evangelicalism, or what James Barr is happy to call Fundamentalism. Here the intent is to keep the historic and organic relationship between the *lower* criticism and the *higher* criticism surgically severed. This is for the purpose of sanctioning the former while disallowing the legitimacy of the latter. Barr is correct when he observes that

... 'lower criticism', the study of the history and variations of the text, is accepted by conservatives, while 'higher criticism', the reconstruction of sources and datings and different authorships, is not (Barr *Fundamentalism* 1978:279).

In fact, such Evangelical "believing criticism"--a phrase used by Mark Noll (*Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America* 1986:117)--chooses no longer to refer to textual work as *lower* criticism, preferring to use nearly exclusively the word *textual* criticism, thus no longer making clear the fact that historically *lower* criticism was the foundation on which rested the *higher* critical theories and framework. William Peterson acknowledges this relationship:

Textual critics occupy themselves with cataloging, collating, and editing. The higher critics seek the most primitive recoverable form of a given pericope--regardless of where it occurs. Although each works in his or her own bailiwick, a synthesis is necessary (Petersen *Prologue in Gospel Traditions in the Second Century: Origins, Recensions, Text, and Transmission* ed. by W.L. Petersen 1989:1-2).

of the New Testament 2nd ed. 1989:51). Nevertheless, there is no discussion of the dogmatic specifics involved in these cases nor their possible implications.

Once separated from higher criticism by Evangelicals in the nineteenth century, lower criticism then became domesticated and tamed by means of the *ideology of harmless engagement*. In Noll's words

While doubts about modern text-critical research continue to plague the generality of evangelical and fundamentalist churches, these scruples have long been set to rest among academically qualified conservatives (Noll 117).⁷

It is my contention that the source of this modern twentieth-century consensus regarding the perception that the lower critical task is relatively harmless, had its roots in an eighteenth-century debate. That it has become axiomatic, I will argue, is the result of a long-standing, nearly uncritical assumption of its validity in the absence of both a sufficient recollection of the historical circumstances that gave rise to its original purposefulness, and the lack of a systematic and comprehensive intellectual analysis of those historical circumstances. That it was an ideological stance connected with the heat of rhetorical debate discourse, rather than a critically demonstrated postulate, can only be illuminated by retracing the ground and recapturing the historical backdrop of the debate and the rhetoric.

I am greatly assisted in my task to demonstrate that this ideology is just that, an ideology rather than an established historical reality, by the appearance

⁷Another way of putting what Noll, an apologist of sorts of the Evangelical cause, has said, is the assessment of Edward Hobbs: "...since the [nineteen] thirties textual criticism in America has tended to attract fundamentalists for a very simple reason: when they want to get a doctoral degree in Biblical studies, the fundamentalists are usually more interested in the Bible than in anything else. But you have to go to a good place like Harvard or Chicago to get a good degree, and there are all those wild people there, radicals and liberals, so what in the Bible can you study that is safe? Textual Criticism" (O'Flaherty 1979:22).

of a work, the timeliness of which can hardly be overestimated, appearing as it did just as I was bringing my research to a close. Bart Ehrman's monumental *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (OUP 1993), has forever put to bed the debate as to whether or not dogma has been affected by deliberate, theologically motivated, textual alteration and interpolation. Ehrman has established both as an historian of the patristic era as well as one of the the foremost N.T. text critics in the American context today,⁸ that there has been a near culpable ignoring of this phenomenon though the data were well in reach:

The question mark of significance has long bedeviled analyses of this kind. For the past century many textual scholars have stood beneath the mesmerizing gaze of the mighty Hort, who judged that apart from Marcion, scribes did not effect theological changes in their copies of Scripture. Naturally, other scholars have dutifully demurred, and produced interesting if scattered examples of just this disputed phenomenon.... But...no full-length investigations have been forthcoming. Nor is the reason hard to find: even those who have recognized the phenomenon have underplayed its scope (Ehrman 1993:276)⁹

⁸Ehrman is a protégé of Bruce Metzger, the undisputed dean of N.T. text criticism in America, and Ehrman currently serves as Chair of the New Testament Section of the Society of Biblical Literature, perhaps the leading international forum in the discipline today.

⁹Perhaps Ehrman himself has not fully escaped this propensity as well: why is it that there is "scarce need to posit any kind of ulterior motive for this kind of scribal activity" [i.e. theological alteration of the text]?. Why must it be "enough to recognize that when scribes modified their texts, they did so in light of what they already believed their Scriptures taught" (Ehrman:279). Surely this is to beg the question. Where *in Scripture* do we find the christological definitions found in the Nicene Creed or in Athanasius's theology? As Ehrman himself admitted "...it is never easy, from the historian's perspective, to determine whether the text led Christians to embrace a doctrine or whether the doctrine led Christians to modify the text (either in their minds or on the page). In this religion, in particular, texts and beliefs coalesce into a messy symbiotic relationship, not always susceptible to the discrete conceptual categories of the historian" (279).

Ehrman has finally filled this gap:

The importance of theologically oriented variations...far outweighs their actual numerical count. We can begin by reflecting on their implications for exegesis and the rise of Christian doctrine. The textual problems we have examined affect the interpretation of many of the familiar and historically significant passages of the New Testament: the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke, the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel, the baptismal accounts of the Synoptics, the passion narratives, and other familiar passages in Acts, Paul, Hebrews, and the Catholic epistles. In some instances, the interpretations of these passages--and the books within which they are found--hinge on the textual decision; in virtually every case, the variant readings demonstrate how the passages *were* understood by scribes who "read" their interpretations not only out of the text but actually into it, as they modified the words in accordance with what they were taken to mean (276)

Moreover, the specifics of the dogmatically significant textual alterations and interpolations found in Ehrman's data

relate to the basic doctrinal concerns of early Christian theologians and, presumably, laypersons alike: Was Jesus the Messiah predicted in the Old Testament? Was Joseph his father? Was Jesus born as a human? Was he really tempted? Was he able to sin? Was he adopted to be the Son of God at his baptism? At his resurrection? Or was he himself God? Was Jesus Christ one person or two persons? Did he have a physical body after his resurrection? And many others. The ways scribes answered these questions affected the way they transcribed their texts. And the way they transcribed their texts has affected, to some degree, the way modern exegetes and theologians have answered these questions (281-282).

Ehrman's study may well be the single most important piece of historical work produced in the field of text criticism in this century.

His conclusion is one which in this dissertation I will argue was reached (if not in the specifics of all the detail, certainly in the broad premise) by the real pioneers of Biblical criticism: the English antitrinitarian Biblical critics. Two hundred years before Ehrman's study appeared it was Antitrinitarians who pushed the boundaries in Biblical criticism toward his conclusions well before the divines of the established church had courage enough to touch their sacred text. Moreover, it was implications from such textual data that signalled the

advanced stages of the process of desacralization¹⁰ which would culminate in the nineteenth-century German higher criticism.

It will be the purpose of this dissertation to trace the roots of the *ideology of harmless engagement* (which Ehrman has helped to finally discredit), explain the historical conditions that gave rise to it, and in so doing, demonstrate how it has functioned to cloud a more accurate understanding of the source of desacralization.

Often it has been argued that the real crisis of Biblical authority within believing Protestant communities was the result of the nineteenth-century German *higher* critical project.¹¹ This, in turn, is considered to be primarily the fruit of German Idealistic Philosophy rather than the necessary and legitimate result of a genuine Biblical criticism.¹² While I fully accept that German Idealism did influence the higher critical project (certainly Baur is a classic example), I believe an earlier issue must be addressed to fully understand the historical development and relationship between Biblical criticism and speculative philosophical influences.

¹⁰I will treat below what I believe to be the decisive characteristic that defines how and why the Christian Bible is a sacred text which then will also serve to explicate what desacralization means in the context of this study.

¹¹Typical of this argument is Nigel Cameron's study, *Biblical Higher Criticism and the Defense of Infallibilism in Nineteenth Century Britain* (1987).

¹²The following is a familiar way of treating the subject: "It was not Pietism but the Rationalism of the Enlightenment that caused the collapse of the Orthodox theory of Verbal inspiration. Rationalism meant a critical approach towards the Bible on philosophical grounds.... Due especially to the dominance of the philosophy of *Immanuel Kant*, the concept of revelation was naturalized: the revelation contained in the Bible must be understood as something that is commonly human, reasonable and moral" (Miikka Ruokanen, *Doctrina Divinitus Inspirata: Martin Luther's Position in the Ecumenical Problem of Biblical Inspiration* 1985:137).

Here we come upon a circle that must be broken: which came first, speculative philosophy which then paved the way for the higher critical negation of the sacredness of the text; or was there a prior process of desacralization which then allowed a free handling of the text, analogous to any other historical document, inviting the viability of speculative philosophy to offer German Idealism as a replacement for the hermeneutic of the Church?¹³ Certainly these are mammoth questions which many have taken in hand to answer.

Various recent attempts to answer these questions have all made their contribution: Peter Harrison has recently highlighted the impact of eighteenth-century English Deism in reducing the unique quality of the Bible and Christianity, in his important *Religion and the Religions in the English Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1990). Klaus Scholder, late Professor of Modern Church History at the University of Tübingen, pushed the genesis back even further, into the seventeenth century. He argues in his *The Birth of Modern Critical Theology* (Eng. trans. SCM, 1990) that it was the signing of the treaty ending the Thirty Years War, agreeing to put religion to one side for the purposes of a political settlement, which then sanctioned various interpretations of the one Christian Faith.

Certainly the beginning of the process of desacralization started even earlier still--*very* early in fact--undermining an absolute confidence in the epistemological value of Biblical historical narrative and inviting an autonomous quest for certainty within the realm of human reason. It is the thesis of this dissertation that the nineteenth century German *Leben-Jesu Forschung*, more

¹³Hans Frei has certainly produced the definitive study of this process in his *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (1974) which I will mention at a latter stage.

popularly known as the *Quest for the Historical Jesus*,¹⁴ actually began with the first halting steps taken by Erasmus toward the *Quest for the Historical Text*.¹⁵ Moreover, it was, I maintain, Erasmus's omission of the *comma Johanneum* in his *Novum Instrumentum* (1516) that signals the beginning of the process of desacralization for the Judeo-Christian Bible, rather than the later developments of either eighteenth-century Deism, or the nineteenth-century, German higher critical project which were, in many respects, the results of and responses to the already fully engaged process of desacralization.

Hence, Idealism was not the prime mover initiating the process of desacralization, or leading to a naturalistic view of the Bible. Rather, the nineteenth century quest to construct a *modern* theology, necessitated by the results of the German higher criticism, was an attempt to reconstruct a new and relevant meaning from the Bible for the new epistemological demands and *Sitz-im-Leben* produced by Idealism:

desacralization \Rightarrow higher criticism \Rightarrow German Idealism

rather than:

German Idealism \Rightarrow desacralization \Rightarrow higher criticism

¹⁴There were a series of Victorian "Lives of Jesus" published by English divines but these were of a completely different genus from those produced in Germany and France. On this see Daniel L. Pals *The Victorian "Lives" of Jesus* (1982).

¹⁵Henning Graf Reventlow has also rightly pointed to Erasmus as giving rise to the modern approach to the Bible in his *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World* (1985), but does not address the specific contribution of Erasmus's text criticism.

Nor was Deism and the legacy of scepticism the beginning of desacralization. According to the model I propose, Salvatorelli, in his detailed study, "From Locke to Reitzenstein: The Historical Investigation of the Origins of Christianity" *Harvard Theological Review* 22:4 (October, 1929): 263-369, also misstates the point when he argues that the eighteenth-century sceptics were responsible for initiating desacralization:

The historical investigation of the origins of Christianity began with the English deists, who, being philosophers and not professional historians, were for that very reason able to give the first forward impulse to the historical study of Jesus and of primitive Christianity. *No purely historical interest could have induced Christian Europe to apply criticism to its sacred books...*(emphasis mine) (Salvatorelli 1929:263).

As a matter of fact the Deists made appeal to historical evidence provided earlier by Erasmus and Grotius who as text critics *were working* from a *purely historical interest* when publicly acknowledging the christologically significant interpolations/alterations found in the Greek and Latin MSS. of the N.T. The Deists had a prior dependence on these sixteenth and seventeenth-century Biblical scholars who were practising lower critics, philologists, as well as historians--though not sceptics--doing for the text of Scripture what Valla had accomplished with his critique of the *Donation of Constantine*. Hence my model looks like this:

lower critics (historical consciousness) \Rightarrow Deists/sceptics \Rightarrow natural religion
rather than:

Deists/sceptics \Rightarrow historical consciousness \Rightarrow natural religion

In fact, it was the historical criticisms of dogmatically significant textual variants that contributed to the opening of the way for the Deistic project. Their project assumed a naturalistic view of the Bible. This in turn was conditioned by a liberating historical consciousness, the natural by-product of the desacralizing

results of the earlier text critics. Peter Byrne in his *Natural Religion and the Nature of Religion: the Legacy of Deism* puts it quite rightly:

The deistic criticism of the claims for Christianity's uniqueness and authority naturally focuses on the character of the Biblical witness, for it was on the Biblical witness that eighteenth-century theology rested these claims. To question the status of Christianity as a uniquely divine dispensation was to question the status of the Scriptures as divinely inspired writings recording events supernatural in character. In the deistic onslaught on the Bible, discussion of the alleged miraculous, supernatural character of the events it relates and of the divine status of its words are inextricably connected (Byrne 1989:93).

Text critical evidence provided by reliable and progressive thinkers such as Erasmus and Grotius, demonstrating that a stratum of the Biblical text had been over-laid with interpolated, dogmatic material, certainly fed the impulse toward a naturalistic assessment of the Biblical documents as a whole.

In what follows I will explain my understanding of *Ideologiekritik* and how it will be used in this study. I will then treat my understanding of the Judeo-Christian Bible phenomenologically understood as a sacred text within the context of *Religionsgeschichte*. I will then address the major thematic categories employed by the dissertation as they are informed by Harnack in his *Dogmengeschichte* (4th ed. 1905). Finally, the last section will provide a brief statement of the purpose and content of each chapter as they contribute to my thesis.

One of the fruitful results of this study will be the highlighting of the dynamics involved in the historical process of desacralization as concerns the Judeo-Christian Bible. It was the perceived threat of such desacralization within post-Reformation, Christian communities, that the *ideology of harmless engagement* was meant to counter. Hence, aspects of this research will offer further insight on the process of secularization within the early-modern European context.

Others will find it offers additional light for those with an interest in comparative religions, particularly regarding such contemporary religious social developments as the *Fatwa* against Salman Rushdie because of his novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988). Eighteenth and nineteenth-century Christian communities felt an analogous threat from the lower criticism of the N.T. to that expressed by contemporary Islamic Fundamentalists as a result of Rushdie's "blasphemous" novel.

Furthermore, there will be implications for those interested in the theme of *the development of doctrine*,¹⁶ because the antitrinitarians--who first practised lower criticism with the greatest freedom--were convinced that they had detected clear evidence for the late development of the dogmas of the Trinity and the deity of Christ within the Greek and Latin ecclesiastical recensions of the New Testament.

B. Ideology, the History of Religions and the Historical Task

In order to attain as large a degree of objectivity as possible so that one does not fall victim to the accusation that one ideology is merely being used to

¹⁶As classically set forth in its quintessential German rationalist frame of mind by Strauss in his exceedingly radical *Die christliche Glaubenslehre in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung und im Kampfe mit der modernen Wissenschaft dargestellt*, 2 vols (Tübingen, 1840-1841), to which Newman gave a response on the eve of his gathering into the fold of the Roman communion in his *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* 2nd ed. (1846), and more recently by Owen Chadwick, *From Bossuet to Newman: The Idea of Doctrinal Development* (1957) and Aidan Nichols, *From Newman to Congar: The Idea of Doctrinal Development from the Victorians to the Second Vatican Council* (1990); and the Harnack of our age, Jaroslav Pelikan in his *Development of Christian Doctrine: Some Historical Prolegomena* (1969), and even the more popular treatment of Peter Toon in his *The Development of Doctrine in the Church* (1979).

criticise another, I intend to employ a phenomenological method, as well as an intellectual history approach to my subject. Hence, a *descriptive* method will be employed when defining the significance of the Bible as a sacred text in this study and when engaged in the critique of ideology, and an *explicative* treatment will be used when discussing intellectual influences in the historical narrative.

Kurt Rudolph, in his seminal essay "The History of Religions and the Critique of Ideologies" in his *Historical Fundamentals and the Study of Religions* (1985), encourages me to consider the potentially fruitful results of this approach:

The extent to which it is advisable for the history of religions to engage in the critique of ideologies is shown by reflections that attempt to mediate between the "scientific" and the "hermeneutical," or between "explanation" as practiced by the natural sciences and "understanding" as sought by the human sciences.... Thus, hermeneutics and the critique of ideologies interpenetrate. From [the] concerns of the philosophy of history, the history of religions, too, can derive its right to incorporate the critique of ideologies into its investigations (Rudolph 1985:67).

What do I mean by ideology? The word has its own seriously tainted political history, particularly the Marxist use of it defined as

the specific sum of communal perceptions, to which belong philosophy, religion, music, and science, the so-called super-structure. It serves the interests of individual classes or of the "communal consciousness" of the class powers. Whether an ideology is correct or false is determined by its place in the class struggle, which also determines its contents (64).

But Rudolph rightly suggests that there is also a more neutral understanding of the term, "that is, as a scientific term...to denote 'the teaching of the science of ideas'" (64). But for historians a still better definition is "human concepts as they are constituted historically and stamped with a particular world view and as they decisively determine human thoughts, perceptions, and behaviour" (64). Yet, in order to be successful, at every stage the critique of historically conditioned ideology "will have to engage in self-critical reflection, to see whether it has itself been inherited ideologically" (65).

I shall address below specifically why I believe my critique of the ideology of harmless engagement does not stem from yet another ideological point of

view; but for now I must make clear my full agreement with Rudolph that within the context of an historical study what is sought is "a factual critique striving for objectivity that arises out of historical work as such" and that this includes

criticism of sources and traditions as well as the critical reflection about the world of religious conceptions, together with that reflection's emancipating consequences, to which a criticism of sources and traditions gives rise (65).

And importantly, "A pragmatic critique of ideologies, that is, a critique that seeks to destroy religion from political motives, cannot be the task of the history of religions" (67).

But these qualifications aside, the true value of *Ideologiekritik* is to be found in "reclaiming a critical attitude toward religious traditions and interpretations and by setting aside prejudices...". In so doing "ideological criticism can help free the history of religions from the clutches of theology and missiology" (74). Furthermore "the practice of critiquing traditions would have an enlightening and emancipating effect on the self-understanding of contemporary religions, which are still in part rigidly orthodox and dogmatic" (75). Rudolph then invokes Gadamer who succinctly observed

To the essence of historical sciences belong[s] the interpenetration of critical explanation, which criticizes the naive respect for traditions, and the traditions, which continue to be effective and which help determine the historical horizon (75).

Rüdiger Buber adds to the theme by noting "When reflection is prepared for by a critique of ideologies, the concrete, historical character (Signatur) becomes transparent to the object of reflection" (75). And, in Dilthey's words, "Historical consciousness breaks the last chains which philosophy and the natural sciences have not been able to destroy" (75). The end result, particularly for our study, will be to employ *Ideologiekritik* to "investigate critically the changing entanglement of religion and politics, 'church' and 'state,' especially in regard to

the various religious ideologies of dominance that have left religion open to manipulation" (75).

C. The Phenomenology of the Sacred Text

1. A General Overview

It is not an all together surprising development that within the historiography of lower criticism¹⁷ there has never been found even the slightest hint of prolegomena addressing the phenomenology of a sacred text; nor, consequently, what the implications might be for the criticism of the sacred text of the Judeo-Christian Bible. Dieter Georgi in his evocative essay "The Interest in Life of Jesus Theology as a Paradigm for the Social History of Biblical Criticism" (*Harvard Theological Review* 85 1992), rightly noted

Historians, including biblical critics, are not known for exposing themselves to the same kind of historical criticism that they apply to everything and everyone else. The historical situation of contemporary exegetes and their social conditions usually remain uninvestigated and thus--from a historical-critical and socio-historical perspective--unquestioned (Georgi 1992:51).

Moreover, with specific reference to the history of the discipline of N.T. text criticism, the words of Eldon Jay Epp, a leading American text critic, are to the point:

History, theory, and practice are interwoven in most realms of human knowledge, yet students approaching a field often care little about its history; they are concerned with its application and how the discipline is practiced.... Students first grappling with NT textual criticism are not likely to be different--they want to know the "jargon," the "rules," and the basic methods that will permit them to practice the art and (as they are more

¹⁷This tends to be short surveys--sometimes not so short--embodied in manuals treating the discipline since the close of the last century, or in N.T. introductions. Before then such sketches would be found in the prolegomena associated with the various published editions of the Greek N.T. from Erasmus onward.

likely to view it) the science of textual criticism. In this particular subfield of NT studies, however, the history and the practice of the discipline cannot easily be separated. After all, the canons of criticism--the so-called "rules" in textual criticism--are anything but objective standards that can be applied in a rigid, mechanical fashion. Rather--often as not--they are overlapping or competing guidelines, or they involve principles that depend on elusive historical information or reconstructions, or on theoretical judgments about developments largely lost to us in the remote past.... These canons have not appeared randomly, nor do they operate independently, but they issue from and interact with their own on-going history (Epp "New Testament Textual Criticism Past, Present, and Future: Reflections on the Alands' *Text of the New Testament*," *Harvard Theological Review* 82 1989:213).

This lost dimension of historical self-criticism within the discipline of N.T. text criticism exists because the discipline, at least since its more systematic expressions from the nineteenth century forward, has been too busy attempting to dislodge a sense of sacredness from the text in its own self-interest to get on with the work of criticism. In the name of scientific endeavour, the goal of the discipline to gain legitimization for the critical reconstruction of the Greek N.T. was too single-minded to be concerned about the actual religious nature of the text itself.

This provides one of the reasons why the *ideology of harmless engagement* found expression--it was a witness to the fact that at least potentially there might be a loss of content, by way of textual criticism, that historically was considered to be sacred and hence authoritative in some religious sense. One can quickly perceive the potential political implications involved in this when one considers the facts that there were those who advocated that Erasmus--along with his "critical" edition of the Greek N.T.--should be burnt at the stake for omitting a proof text for the Trinity (I John 5:7-8); and that the non-Trinitarian, Wettstein, was deposed from his ministerial post by the Basel Town Council for challenging a traditional proof text for the deity of Christ (I Tim. 3:16) in his proposal for a critical edition of the Greek N.T.

Hence, when Antitrinitarians offered a critique of christologically significant textual variants it must be admitted that they did so many times with

the collateral intention of pointing out the illegitimacy of the established church's intolerance toward their theological perspective; but their critique was first of all a matter of historical criticism, not a product of ideology. The descriptive truth of the matter stood whether it was pointed out by Trinitarian, or non-Trinitarian. Whereas, the more cogent the Antitrinitarian case became the more evident it was that the orthodox claim (that textual variants never affect dogma) was ideological rather than a descriptive state of affairs. Hence, the ideological component stemmed in one direction only.

2. The Determinative Trait of the Judeo-Christian Sacred Text: Verbal Inspiration

This near complete absence of consciousness regarding what might be the phenomenological characteristics of the N.T. as a *sacred* text is not confined to text critics. It was found even in others with highly developed critical sensibilities, such as Karl Barth. Barth was theologically incapable of submitting the Bible to a phenomenological study because he feared certain of its traits would be found to be in common with other texts of other world religions. To compare the Christian Bible with other sacred texts would be to risk undermining his own, post-critical project of reconstructing a paradigm that would retrieve the Bible from nineteenth century modernism.

Hence, in order to launch his own project, earlier paradigms were deemed heretical by him particularly that of the seventeenth-century Protestant dogmaticians. This is because they seemed to have given the Judaeo-Christian sacred text characteristics similar to other sacred texts of other world religions, characteristics he nevertheless admitted had been found in the valuation of Scripture in early catholic tradition as well:

...in this form [verbal inspiration as understood by the Protestant dogmaticians] the Bible became so like the holy books of other religions, for which something similar had always been claimed, that the superiority of its claim could not be asserted in relation to them or to the many achievements of the human spirit generally (Barth *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God* 1956 vol. 1, part 2:525-526).¹⁸

For Barth, therefore, the Protestant dogmaticians' view of Scripture as *verbally inspired* was, paradoxically, "naturalistic" because it presupposed that God had actually used human language as a vehicle for divine revelatory propositions. Consequently, Barth's final judgement was that "therefore we have to resist and reject the 17th-century doctrine of inspiration as false doctrine" (Barth:525).

In an unguarded moment, however, Barth frankly admitted that the position of the Protestant dogmaticians was "merely a development and systematization of statements which had been heard in the Church since the first centuries" (525).

Edward Hobbs has captured the reasons for this paradoxical resistance to a phenomenological approach amongst modern, critical theologians, in rather straight-forward terms:

...the study of sacred texts imposes yet another set of problems different from those of the classics, because here people have axes to grind that extend beyond their scholarly opinions (O'Flaherty 1979:24).

A clear example of this axe grinding can be found in the postulation of Paul Ricoeur who suggests that "Maybe in the case of Christianity there *is* no sacred text, because it is not the text which is sacred, but the One about which it

¹⁸Other scholars with a critical capacity have, nevertheless, also fallen prey to resisting a phenomenological approach because of reasons similar to those of Barth. Piepkorn who did not like the word "inerrancy" as used in fundamentalist communities offered his criticism to what might be the results of a phenomenological analysis: "...when we begin to take the term ["inerrancy"] literally of the Sacred Scriptures as such, a student of comparative religion might be impelled to observe that we are perilously close to the threshold of a tendency which exists in other world religions" Piepkorn "What Does 'Inerrancy' Mean?" *Concordia Theological Monthly* 36 (September 1965:580).

is spoken" (O'Flaherty:271).¹⁹ Surely this is a wholly *modern* theological paradigm, sharing more in common with Barth than with patristic, medieval, Reformational or post-Reformational thought. It was during these periods that the *verbal inspiration* of the Christian Bible was held to be its most decisive characteristic, making it, indeed, a *sacred* text.

Patristic and Medieval Eras: John Barton, in his recent Bampton Lectures for 1988, confirms Barth's understanding of the early Church:

We have to acknowledge that the authority of the books in the "canon" was [for the early Church] clearly much greater than it is for most modern people. This authority was felt to inhere in the exact verbal form of the biblical text to an extent now scarcely believed even by fundamentalists (*People of the Book: The Authority of the Bible in Christianity* 1988:28).

Moreover, R.P.C. and A.T. Hanson have recently admitted the same point:

The Fathers' treatment of the Bible is essentially atomic. It rests upon the assumption, of course, that there is a pretty similar level of inspiration and revelation to be found in every part of the text (*The Bible Without Illusions* 1989:30).

In fact, R.P.C. Hanson has insisted that verbal inspiration has always been the official doctrine of the Church and that,

No alternative meaning of the word 'inspiration' when applied to the Bible has been produced which has any connection with the root meaning of the word itself.... We still cling to the word [inspiration], speaking of Scripture but we give no meaning to it which does not alter it into an entirely different concept unconnected with the traditional one (Hanson *The Attractiveness of God: Essays in Christian Doctrine* 1973:21).

¹⁹He bases this on the fact that the Christian Bible was never restricted to any one *sacred* language. But this may be a bit of a straw man since the restriction concerning the Qur'an on this point is not a *universal* characteristic of a sacred text. Moreover, there certainly has been resistance to translations both from the Hebrew Bible as well as from the Greek Christian Bible and the *Vulgata Latina*, thus illustrating the significance of the sacred text in its most primal verbal dress, or in the case of the Latin Bible, in the dress in which it, indeed, attained its sacred status.

Medieval/Late Medieval Eras: Richard Muller in his Post-Reformation

Reformed Dogmatics: Holy Scripture has summed up the medieval view as follows:

A further development of the concept of inspiration along the lines adumbrated by Aquinas occurred in the fifteenth century.... God raises the mind of the prophet or apostle to a higher level of understanding, by speaking or dictating to the soul truths that the individual prophet or apostle will formulate into inward or mental words and subsequently either write or speak.... Such theorizations did not, however, rule out or even ultimately conflict with the more traditional concept of a dictation by the Holy Spirit to an amanuensis, secretary, or "penman" (*calamus*) found in such diverse theologians of the later Middle Ages as Wyclif, Biel, and D'Ailly, but rather reinforced the understanding given to the traditional language of dictation by Aquinas--namely, an inward elevation of mind and spirit rather than use of the prophets and apostles as mindless instruments (Muller 1993:36-37).

Reformation Era: Frederic Farrar in his History of Interpretation uses phenomenologically accurate language when he states that for the Protestants and the Protestant dogmaticians of the orthodox era, sacred Scripture was something to be appealed to "against Anabaptists, against Socinians, against Romanists...as a decisive oracle" (Farrar 1886:370). Again Muller helps here as well, acknowledging that "The roots of scholastic Protestant formulation lie deep in the tradition of the church, reaching back through the Reformation into the Middle Ages and even into the patristic period" (Muller 1993:241). This is constituted in the following formulation:

Inspiration, according to the orthodox writers, was a matter of both substance and form--so that the entirety of Scripture is to be understood as inspired. Inspiration is, thus, "whole" or "entire" (*integra*) extending to both the meaning of the words and the words themselves, and consists in both "immediate revelation" and the "direction" of the biblical authors by the Spirit (Muller 1993:255).²⁰

²⁰Certainly there is a good deal of tension in the Reformers' theological assessment of the original language texts of the Bible and the way they went about their exegetical tasks where the more Erasmian, philological methods of Renaissance humanism can be detected throughout. But because Scripture was the sole repository of sacred revelation, rather than Word and Tradition, the verbal content was generally treated with the utmost seriousness. On Luther's view of inspiration see Miikka Ruokanen, *Doctrina Divinitus*

Hence, indeed, the Scripture was sacred to its final vocable--an oracle, as Farrar mockingly assessed it.

This *verbal* paradigm lost its significance during the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. In Pelikan's words

...once a dictation theory of inspiration had been surrendered, there arose a need to give due recognition to the place of the human component in the divine action of inspiration (Pelikan *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* vol. 5 1989:244).

This desacralization--for this is what it was--led to

those whose leading principle in interpreting Scripture was 'that the Bible is a book written for men, in the language of men' and who therefore used it to repudiate the trinitarian doctrine of the orthodox churches (Pelikan 1989:245).

Hence, to discuss the loss of the *verbal* view of inspiration is to discuss the desacralization of Scripture; and to discuss the birth and development of the *lower* criticism of the New Testament documents is to discuss the loss of *verbal* inspiration. Therefore to discuss the rise and development of the discipline of lower criticism is to discuss the history of the process of desacralization within the Christian tradition.

What Barth--and others--have tended to avoid because of the inconvenience the parallels with other sacred texts caused their own working

Inspirata: Martin Luther's Position in the Ecumenical Problem of Biblical Inspiration (1985). Ruokanen also deals with Calvin and cites current literature on him here, pp. 134-135. It cannot be disputed, however, that it was the post-Reformation dogmatic tradition that gave clear and explicit definitional understanding to how the Christian Bible was to be understood as a sacred text in a way the Reformers never addressed. The latter were busy with the prior task of asserting the exclusive prerogatives of *sola Scriptura*. On the later dogmatists' articulation of the sacred text characteristics of the original language texts of Scripture see Ruokanen (121-135) and the literature cited there.

paradigm, I discovered Allan Menzies embraced with open arms in an early attempt to construct a cursory phenomenological study treating "The Natural History of Sacred Books" in the *American Journal of Theology* (1897):

The study of comparative religion is destined to exercise a profound influence on every branch of Christian theology. We are coming to see that many of the cherished doctrines of our own religion are not peculiar to Christianity, but have their parallels in other faiths.... The Christian student must more and more be led to admit that he cannot fully understand a doctrine in his own religion till he has studied the parallel instances in which it is found... (Menzies 1897:71).

Certainly in light of this present study Menzies's remarkable early anticipation of the need for a phenomenological approach is a due credit to his name.

3. Sources Found Useful

In my orientation to the subject of phenomenology I have been assisted, of course, by Husserl's *Ideas, General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* (1958) and his *The Idea of Phenomenology* (1964). Edo Pivcevc has also helped me with Husserl with his *Husserl and Phenomenology* (1970). Joseph Dabney Bettis's *Phenomenology of Religion*, and Ninian Smart's *The Phenomenon of Christianity* (1979) have also assisted. H. Spiegelberg's *The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction* 2 vols. (1971) is perhaps the most exhaustive survey of the phenomenon of phenomenology in all of its international/intellectual manifestations.

More specifically regarding the phenomenology of sacred texts, if James Sanders gave attention to the theme *From Sacred Story to Sacred Text* (1982) and Harold Coward drew attention to *Sacred Word and Sacred Text: Scripture in World Religions* (1988), I will be addressing the next stage in the process: *desacralization* leading *From Sacred Text to Religious Text*. That is, the process that

in Paul Ricoeur's words "began in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries" which resulted in the production of "critical" texts "which are not texts of *any* community, except perhaps of the community of the academic world" (O'Flaherty:271).

A few significant works have recently appeared tending in the direction of a phenomenological analysis of the Christian Bible. Daniel Patte finally takes in hand to address the ironic sounding theme of: *The Religious Dimensions of Biblical Texts* (1990):

This book arose out of the puzzlement: why is it that, in most instances, our exegesis elucidates everything about biblical texts except their religious character?... [A]s I argue in this book, the basic reason is that most exegetes are prevented from perceiving the religious character of biblical texts by the "theory of meaning" upon which their rigorous critical studies are based: the historical paradigm (or "morality of knowledge," in Harvey's words) that provides the criteria for historical-critical exegesis (Patte 1990:ix).

While Patte is more interested in the phenomenology of religious *meaning* within the text, rather than the phenomenology *of the text* itself, his *tendenz* is in the same direction as my own.

Frederick Denny and Rodney Taylor have edited a brief collection of essays titled: *The Holy Book in Comparative Perspective* (1993). Sandra M. Schneiders's *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (1991) sounds as though it might well be a phenomenological treatment but it is actually a modern attempt to reconstruct yet one more prescriptive paradigm.

With a foreword by the always insightful George Steiner, David Jasper has edited a text treating the important theme of *Translating Religious Texts* (1993). A rather extensive recent monograph addressing "how Scripture arose in the first place as a significant human involvement" (44), i.e. "the human tendency to scripturalize" (ix), is W.C. Smith's *What is Scripture: A Comparative Approach* (1993). Echoing Menzies's sentiments of nearly a hundred years ago Smith rightly asserts

For a time Westerners, including secularists, consciously or inadvertently depended on their understanding of the Bible for expanding their sense of scripture around the world. We have reached a stage where we may rather use our new awareness of the world situation to attain a greater understanding of the Bible and of much else both in the West and in other cultures (Smith 1993:x).

This, too, however, is not directly addressing the phenomenology of sacred texts; it is more concerned directly with Scripture as a product of human need, a study of the rise of Scripture as a means for understanding "what it means ultimately to be human--what it has meant, and could or should mean" (x) and so is more in the direction of anthropology/psychology/sociology. Moreover, I differ with Smith in his analysis that the "Qur'an is to Muslims what Christ is to Christians" (46). Rather, it is my contention that for both Jews and Christians it is *also* "difficult to exaggerate the centrality, and the transcendence," (46) of *their* sacred books in parallel with that of the Qur'an for Muslims. Smith, however, wants to contrast Christians for whom "God's central revelation is in the person of Christ, with the Bible as *record* of that revelation" (emphasis mine) with "the genuine parallel...between the Qur'an and Christ, as the two paramount motifs" (46).

But surely a firm grasp of the place of Scripture in the early Christian communities would give us a different picture. Ninian Smart reminds us that:

It is important to recognize that even if the scriptures became, naturally enough, objects of study and commentary, they were primarily encountered, in the life of the christian, as the basis of public liturgical acts and preaching.... honoured by a procession from behind the iconostasis known as the "Little Entrance." Here in very clear form was expressed a way of looking at the Gospels as more than a set of books, or more even than readings. They were, and are still, seen in this act as bringing to us the Redeemer. Christ is made present again to the faithful in the reading. The procession, the hymns, the candles, the kissing, the whole numinous occasion is replete with the glory of Christ himself. This reverence for the Gospels recognizes in them something of the substance of Christ himself... (Ninian Smart *The Phenomenon of Christianity* 1979:222).

Oddly, Smith admits that contra his own opinion

Muslims pay Jews and Christians the compliment of calling them *also* "People of the Book," by which they mean that these groups have what approximates, whether closely or in partially distorted fashion, to religion in

its true and proper form--as distinct from pagans and idolators who, without divine revelation in this form, this book form, are lost (emphasis mine) (47).

Ninian Smart and Richard Hecht in their *Sacred Texts of the World: A Universal Anthology* (1982), have provided what I think is the best definition, from a history-of-religions stand point, of what constitutes a sacred text:

We may look at sacred texts as being those which contain a power and authority and are given certain status within a given community. Such communities and traditions are held together most typically through liturgical acts, which help to focus life upon that which is ultimate and to which the sacred texts give testimony. The status of the sacred text is canonical: as well as being normative for a community or tradition, it is also that community or tradition's canon or canonical text. The term 'canon' has a variety of meanings, but in the context of sacred texts it means the defined grouping of texts for the community or tradition.... one does not add to or subtract from them (xiii-xiv).

The given community we have in view, of course, is the Christian Church; the liturgy is that, broadly speaking, reflecting catholic orthodoxy from the fourth century, which in turn, reinforced the sacred text standard.²¹

Since (and before) the emergence of catholic orthodoxy, until the Reformation, the Bible was forever to be found within the context of church use and so retained its status as a sacred text.²² It was, in fact, ecclesiastical *use* that

²¹That is, the orthodoxy arrived at by the early Councils reinforced a canonical configuration of the N.T. text which best reflected this orthodoxy from among the several floating textual recensions. On this see Ehrman (1993).

²²The Latin Bible seemed to suffer more during the medieval era than did the Greek Bible. R. Loewe noted, "In the centuries following Jerome's death, the spread of both the new version [Jerome's] and the Old Latin remained ungoverned by self-conscious consistency or the canons of responsible textual criticism.... Heterogeneous interpolations would be included to meet the requirements of the immediate situation, and the text thus modified would become perpetuated as it was diffused in the course of missionary activity." "The Medieval History of the Latin Vulgate," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible* ed. by G.W.H. Lampe Vol. 2, p.109.

actually determined the *macro* canon (books) as well as the *micro* canon (the textual form of those books).²³

Not only was the Bible regarded as a sacred text in liturgical or catechetical functions but also in the process of reproduction. We find that scribal habits became much more conservative from the fourth century onward--the century that witnessed the emergence of the canon²⁴--particularly within the Greek tradition, if not always in the Latin.²⁵

As the Church divided into the Eastern (Greek) and Western (Latin) communities, the canonical dimensions of the sacred text experienced a diversity. A *Greek* vulgate became the standard in the Eastern Church, corresponding to a

²³Adolf Jülicher spoke of *Anagnosis*, or public reading in the Church, as one of the earliest criteria for the developing canon. By the time of Justin Martyr (150 C.E.), Jülicher notes, "the first act in the worship of God on Sundays was to read aloud before the whole congregation a portion of Scripture, either from the 'Memoirs' of the Apostles or the writings of the Prophets. It seems to me that there is more here than a mere 'germ of the New Testament Canon,'... the Gospels and the writings of the Prophets are placed on an equal footing." *An Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. by J.P. Ward (1904), pp. 480; 484. Cf. also Hans von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible* (1972), p. 331.

²⁴On the point of scribal habits after the establishment of the canon see Maurice A. Robinson, "Scribal Habits Among Manuscripts of the Apocalypse," unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, TX, 1982.

²⁵ The Greeks disparaged the *Vulgata Latina* because it was merely a translation from the inspired Greek of the New Testament and because Jerome abandoned the Greek LXX Old Testament text--thought to have the sanction of the apostolic Church--in favour of the Hebrew text. On the criticism that Jerome received for this, see his *Apologia contra Rufinum* II, 24-25. On the other hand, the Latins came to regard Jerome's standard as sanctioned by the Pope and the usage of the Western Church and therefore distrusted the editions of the Eastern Church when they differed from Jerome.

Latin vulgate in the West. Eventually the antagonism between these two bodies extended beyond doctrinal disputes to the belief that the canonical texts used to affirm each opposing community's distinctives were themselves corrupted: the Greeks distrusted the Latin Biblical texts and the Latins were convinced the Greeks had altered their texts.

Each textual standard continued to be authoritative, however, for their given community and constituted a sacred text. In both communities these texts were read, studied, interpreted, as well as conceptualized in icons and mosaics (in the East), or in images and stained glass (in the West).

Moreover, in an extended definition of sacred text, offered by Robert Detweiler, "What is a Sacred Text?," *Semeia* 31 (1985:214) he includes the role of "privileged interpreters--priests, shamans, prophets, preachers, ayatollahs...enjoying a special relationship to the divinity...and thus able to disclose the text's 'true' meaning." It was within the Christian communities that the Bible was interpreted, multiplied and distributed as the unique possession of the Church, by churchmen--monks, priests, and bishops--as a sacred text. And verbal inspiration was the determinative trait establishing its sacredness.

I say this lasted until the Reformation, which may seem surprising at first. Was not the Reformation just another form of ecclesial continuity? Was it not the Enlightenment that truly liberated Biblical texts from the domain of church and theology? Without wanting to engage the debate whether the Reformation was the beginning of modernity or a continuation of medievalism, in many respects the answer to these questions is, yes.

Nevertheless, I believe it was the Christian humanist, Desiderius Erasmus, himself a *disaffected* monk, who in a decisive way, disrupted the N.T. canon of the Western Church--putting in its place the Greek N.T. canon of the Eastern Church--and thus set in motion a process that by the nineteenth century,

culminated in the loss of the Bible as a sacred text in the West. What emerged was the Bible as *religious* text, the reconstructed text of the academy.

By religious text I mean a text which still retains a "traditional specialness" but has lost its status as a *sacred* text. Once it was removed from the ecclesiastical matrix, its dimensions and interpretation were no longer determined by theologians who were preeminently churchmen. Leaving the context of the Church, the interpretation of the Bible became subject to a "new hermeneutic"--the hermeneutic of the university. Detweiler observes that the "history of secularization in the west is, in one important sense, the story of readers learning to read our sacred texts in a different way" (225).

D. Chapter Synopses

1. Part One--Prolegomena and the Major Thematic Categories of Dissertation

a. Harnack's *Dogmengeschichte*

Harnack organized his *Dogmengeschichte* (book III, part 2) of post-Reformation communities into what he called the *Threefold Issue of the History of Dogma*: those issues which concerned Roman Catholics, Protestants and Socinians. This corresponds exactly to the results of my own research regarding the three-fold impact of and response to the issue of textual variants and dogma.

While Harnack began with Catholicism and proceeded to Socinianism and then to Protestantism, I have chosen in my prolegomena to alter the steps, treating Protestantism after Catholicism and Socinianism last. Moreover, in that I see Erasmus as the pivotal influence in all three developments, but culminating

more comprehensively in that of the Socinian, I begin my first chapter with a treatment of him as the fount of *restorationism*. In Harnack's words:

What is at least a very one-sided and abstract view of Luther is taken, when we honour in him the man of the new time, the hero of an aspiring age, or the creator of the modern spirit. If we wish to contemplate such heroes, we must turn to Erasmus and his associates... (Harnack 1899 vol. 8:170)

b. Erasmus: *Philological Restorationist Impulse*

In Erasmus, I will argue, we have the very fountainhead of an impulse I call *philological restorationism*, which I maintain was the driving engine that would bring in the full-blown historical criticism of the Enlightenment as well as nineteenth century German higher criticism.²⁶ He by no means can be seen as the exclusive, nor the most decisive influence in these developments; but he was the earliest and the most pervasive in terms of inspiration and direction. In the words of Jerry Bentley it was the Valla/Erasmus approach to biblical studies, which for the first time, "rendered the New Testament an object of detached literary, historical, and philological analysis, as well as a source of theological

²⁶It is almost superfluous to state that it is perhaps the most common ailment of dissertation-writing to want to make one's case so strong that the complexity or multi-factor dimension in any historical study gets minimized in the way that print outside the radius of a looking glass fades by comparison to that enlarged through the magnifying lens. I have tried not to leave the impression that *my* theme is the only one in operation over the ground that I cover. My point is to enlarge on my theme as one which is important (and perhaps in some sense even determinative) but which to date has been treated in a less than a systematic, or intellectual-historical way. It is by no means the exclusive cause of modernity's secularity, though at times the force of my argument, taken in isolation at any given point, might seem to suggest that it was.

doctrine" (Bentley *Humanists and Holy Writ: New Testament Scholarship in the Renaissance* 1983:217).

c. Ecclesiastical Confessionalism: *Catholic Preservationist Impulse*

Walter H. Conser, Jr. in his important study *Church and Confession: Conservative Theologians in Germany, England and America, 1815-1866* (1984) has profiled a cross-cultural manifestation of an ecclesiastical response to both the onset of modernism as well as the rise of the independent, non-corporate propensity of Evangelicalism in the first half of the nineteenth century. This confessional response to intellectual and institutional crises is a recurring theme--surely one of the major themes in the history of Christian thought. With regard to the themes of this dissertation I find that what Conser has highlighted--this impulse to preserve by way of confession, creed and dogmatic formulation, with a stress on a corporate, high ecclesiology--manifests in two parallel catholic responses to the threat of Renaissance lower criticism: the Council of Trent for the Roman communion, and in the seventeenth century dogmaticians of the Protestant scholastic era.

With regard to Rome, Harnack saw dogmatic concentration, as expressed in the decrees of Trent, as a direct contribution of the Reformation:

The dogmatic Decrees of Trent are the shadow of the Reformation. That it was given to Catholicism to understand itself, to give expression to its distinctive dogmatic character, and thereby to rescue itself from the uncertainties of the Middle Ages, was a debt it owed to the Reformation (Harnack 1899 vol. 8:36).

What I will be treating in my second chapter is how this tendency, manifested at Trent, gave explicit and official sanction to the *Vulgata Latina* as the final and exclusive embodiment of the sacred text of the Western Catholic Church. I will argue that this was more a response to the legacy of Erasmus than

even a reply to Protestantism. This Tridentine decree also served the ecclesiastical concern to further sanction the exclusive legitimacy of Western Catholicism: the true church is always in possession of the authentic recension of the sacred text as well as the correct corresponding hermeneutic (ecclesiastical tradition).

Regarding the Protestant catholic tradition, I believe Harnack was correct in saying:

The Reformation on the other hand, as represented in the Christianity of Luther, is in many respects an Old Catholic, or even a medieval phenomenon, while if it be judged of in view of its religious kernel, this cannot be asserted of it, it being rather a restoration of Pauline Christianity in the spirit of a new age (Harnack 1899 vol. 8:169).

Surely this is so: a blend of catholic continuity (e.g. christological orthodoxy) and restorationism (in terms of the N.T. doctrine of *iustificatio*). The Reformers, nearly all of whom began as disciples of Erasmus, concluded with him that the sacred text had been preserved in the original language texts of the Eastern Catholic tradition and the Jewish synagogue. Hence, my third chapter will treat how the Protestant dogmaticians of the seventeenth century countered the Tridentine claim that the Latin Bible was the sacred text of the Church, with their arguments in defense of the original language texts. These they regarded as the locus of the sacred text.

d. Socinianism and the *Quest for the Historical Text*

The fourth chapter, that dealing with the Socinian tradition and the final part of the prolegomena, corresponds to Harnack's assessment of the contribution of Antitrinitarianism to the development of dogma. He has, in fact, organized his treatment of the Antitrinitarian traditions around these two organizing motifs:

Within the history of dogma there are two main points that must be kept in view in order to determine the importance of these movements: (1) their

relation to the formal authorities of Catholicism; (2) their relation to the doctrines of the Trinity and of Christ (Harnack 1899 vol. 8:128).

Harnack goes on to mention almost in passing what will be an important theme of this dissertation: the Antitrinitarian critique of the dogma of the Trinity in the goal of attaining a more primitive expression of the Christian religion *and* as a means of gaining tolerance for their religious opinions:

Here [among the Antitrinitarians] the doctrine of the Trinity was broken up: indeed, the discarding of it was regarded as the most important means for securing purity and freedom for religion. Its place was taken by the doctrines of the *one* God and the created Christ (Harnack 1899 vol. 8:132).

One of the most effective means for making the Antitrinitarian case was to concentrate on the key Christological textual variants which both Trinitarian Romanists as well as Trinitarian Protestants well knew. Because of Lutheranism's more comprehensive attachment to what Harnack's calls the old dogma--"*Luther was the restorer of the old dogma*" (174)--they were better equipped to deal with the Socinian project than were the Reformed, among whom "enormous weight was attached to the argument that it does not befit a Christian to use expressions that are not found in Scripture" (134. n.1).

Hence, ironically, it was Luther who could afford to be ever so humanistic (even Erasmian!) in rejecting the key *locus classicus* for the Trinity, I John 5:7-8, in contrast to Calvin who argued for its authenticity. Harnack was awake to this aspect as well:

From the beginning the Reformed congregations did not take their stand so strongly as the Lutheran on the doctrine of the Trinity and Chalcedonian Christology, the reason being that they thought of the *Reformation* not as merely distinguishing them from the Catholic Church, but as meaning a *breach* with the Church. Just on that account it was much more difficult there to find sufficient grounds for a strict adherence to ecclesiastical antiquity, especially when some passages of Scripture were allowed to create the conviction that the matter was not so plainly and unquestionably contained in the Bible.... It was really the case that in some of the Swiss National Churches Antitrinitarianism came very near being approved. How great the crisis was between the years [15]50-[15]60 is shown by the numerous letters on the Trinitarian question written at that time by Epigones of the Reformation.... The decision lay in Calvin's hands, and he declared Antitrinitarianism heretical.... By his draconian measures against

the Antitrinitarians Calvin protected faith--i.e., Luther's faith (Harnack 1899 vol. 8: 134, n. 1).

Hence, the quest for the *historical* text was for the Socinian not just an academic exercise. It was the means for attaining, ultimately, their religious freedom by forcing orthodox Christians to be true to the results of their own principles, both critical as well as theological. In this chapter I establish that the Antitrinitarian *quest for the historical text* gains its initial momentum from the *Annotationes* of both Erasmus, and his later and enthusiastic protégé, Hugo Grotius, and culminates in the loss of consensus regarding the locus of an ecclesiastically determined *sacred* text. In the place of this consensus emerges the joint endeavour of both Antitrinitarians and Catholics in the eighteenth and nineteenth century quest for the *historical* text. The remaining chapters will be taken up with the historical development of this theme.

The prolegomena will act as backdrop to the remainder of the dissertation and as such they serve more or less as a survey rather than an attempt to offer original or primary research on the themes addressed. To attempt to say something original about sixteenth/seventeenth century developments would be completely outwith the scope of a dissertation attending to the eighteenth/nineteenth centuries. Nevertheless, without such a backdrop no real sense can be made of the significance of the eighteenth and nineteenth century developments.

2. Part Two: The Specific Use of Textual Variants by Eighteenth Century Antitrinitarians

In chapter five I address one of the earliest treatises attempting a systematic refutation of the verbal view of inspiration because of its incompatibility with the data of the lower criticism. This treatise, written originally in French by

another Newtonian, Jean Le Clerc, and translated into English by John Locke, was the occasion for beginning in earnest during the English Enlightenment the reconsideration of the theme: in just what sense is the Bible inspired, and therefore a sacred text, in light of the data coming from the lower criticism?

In chapter six I will be treating Isaac Newton and those other Newtonians who in their quest for rational religion were greatly aided by the phenomenon of textual variants. Newton himself was quite convinced that he had discovered traces of Trinitarian corruption within the N.T. manuscripts of both the Eastern and Western Catholic Churches. Newton and other Antitrinitarian Newtonians used such data to argue against both the Deistic sceptics--apologetically allowing that such doctrines as the Trinity actually bred scepticism--as well as against the intolerance of the established Church of England orthodoxy.

In chapter seven I will illustrate how a strict understanding of *sola Scriptura* has in all probability never worked in practice. Here I establish how Erasmus's *Annotationes* and his paraphrases of the N.T. were models for how both Antitrinitarians as well as orthodox divines fought for dominance in the popular exegesis of Scripture outwith the Church and the pulpit. Both communities treated the same text critical data as found in this series of popular English annotations and paraphrases in ways that would support their given theological orientation.

In chapter eight I treat the textual work of Joseph Priestley and his decisive contributions both to the advancement of N.T. criticism in general and--as in some ways the Newton of his own age--how his reputation as a scientist-cleric developed further the archaeological quest to peel away the layers of dogmatic accretion found within the MSS. of the Greek N.T. As the most highly celebrated Unitarian theologian at the turn of the nineteenth century his

arguments from the textual variants against the virgin birth had considerable influence on the later German higher critical *Quest for the Historical Jesus*.

3. Part Three: The Contribution of Lower Criticism to the Victorian Crisis of Faith

In the ninth chapter I address the second major phase of the ideology of harmless engagement as advocated by Samuel Tregelles in his popular *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament* (1854). This work was an attempt to initiate orthodox churchmen and non-conformist Evangelicals alike into the mysteries of lower criticism without their feeling the historic sense of threat to the classic dogma of verbal inspiration or orthodox christology. Tregelles's project was an attempt to legitimize lower criticism as an expression of his own theological impulse--as a Plymouth Brother--toward *restorationism*. In this he was carrying on in an integral way the original project of Erasmus, howbeit, by retaining the classic Protestant dogmatic view of inspiration.

In this concluding chapter I also treat Samuel Davidson and his goal to advance the textual work of the German Constantine Tischendorf and the latter's critical Greek N.T. in Britain over that of his Evangelical rival, Tregelles. Jointly, Davidson and Tischendorf succeeded in eclipsing both Tregelles' Greek N.T. and his project to join traditional orthodoxy with lower criticism. This deconstructing of the final phase of the ideology of harmless engagement meant the ushering in of lower criticism's contribution to the Victorian Crisis of Faith wherein both the dogma of verbal inspiration and the notion of a sacred text would be consigned to the memory of an earlier, pre-critical era.

PART ONE

Prolegomena

CHAPTER ONE

Erasmus and the Revival of the Academy: The Genesis of Restorationism

A. Introduction

Erasmus insists that linguistic skills open the grammatical sense of the passage and that one discovers the spiritual sense neither by its traditional context in dogma nor--equally important--by allegorical conjecture until one has first established its philological coherence. The fury of the storm breaking out against biblical humanism descended neither on Reuchlin's Rudimenta Hebraica nor on Valla's Adnotationes but on Erasmus' Annotationes. Erasmus' philological method, manifest throughout the Annotationes, requires a mastery not only of the Greek and Latin codices and the exegesis of the Greek and Latin Fathers but also an expert knowledge of secular Greek and Latin classical literature. Consequently, his biblical humanism makes the medieval exegetical tradition anachronistic.... In addition...the radical reformers use Erasmus' Annotationes to establish their revolution especially for a revival of Arian-like Christologies which had been absent from theology for almost a millenium.

--Robert Coogan, *Erasmus, Lee and the Correction of the Vulgate: The Shaking of the Foundations* pp. 15; 13 (1992).

I am indebted for the title of this chapter to a passage in Erasmus's *Antibarbari*, where Erasmus invites his friends in dialogue to "set up an academy...on the model of Plato's" (CWE vol. 23:39). By academy I do not mean anything as institutionalized as the Renaissance Platonic Academy of Florence,¹ for as Jedin rightly assessed, "The Erasmians did not form a secret

¹For a recent treatment of the Platonic Academy of Florence see, Hankins (1991)

society as did the freemasons in the era of Enlightenment; they were linked together by the same community of thought as were the ecclesiastical rationalists two centuries later" (Jedin 1957 I:364).

It is the quality of this shared consciousness, which I believe was analogous in significance to the role played by the Academy in Greek society in undermining ancient Olympian religion, that I wish to highlight. As David Friedrich Strauss put it,

The religion and sacred literature of the Greeks and Hebrews had been gradually developed with the development of the nation, and it was not until the intellectual culture of the people had outgrown the religion of their fathers, and the latter was in consequence verging towards decay, that the discrepancy which is the source of...varying interpretations became apparent (Strauss 1892:44).²

In Erasmus's day when religion had reached a critical state of external decay, it was, I believe and wish to argue, an approach to the textual criticism and interpretation of the Bible without a deliberate reference to the dogmatic tradition of the Church that earnestly set in motion the process of desacralization within early modern Christendom. Furthermore, this Erasmian consciousness shares an organic link with the ancient Academy because of its interest in the ancient, classical, intellectual traditions as a new matrix for understanding the Biblical message.

By Academy, therefore, I mean something roughly analogous to the climate cultivated by our twentieth-century university. Erasmus and his ideas were in no way as modern as ours but he represents an early alternative to the religious/educational status quo with autonomous-like potentiality. And for this Erasmus did find, to some degree, institutional expression for the philological

² On this theme see, Cornford (1957).

side of his program in the contributions he made to the founding of the Trilingual College at Louvain.³

The scholarship swirling around the name Erasmus is so vast and the interpretations so diverse that one enters troubled waters in taking up the subject. David Tracy admitted, "Because his thinking was so rich in subtlety, Erasmus will perhaps never be fully understood. For the same reason the effort to understand him will never cease to be rewarding" (Tracy 1972:9).⁴ Moreover, since this dissertation treats primarily eighteenth and nineteenth century Britain, the author lays no claim to being an Erasmian expert. Nevertheless, because, "the figure of Erasmus of Rotterdam must be included among those thinkers who helped to prepare for biblical criticism in the Enlightenment," (Reventlow, 1985:39) he can hardly be avoided in this study.⁵

³ On this see Bentley (1979) and de Vocht (1951-55) and Allen (1934). On Erasmus and education in general see Woodward (1904). Here Woodward rightly observed, "Indeed it may be reasonably maintained that of all his activities none was more congenial to him, none more characteristic, none of more influence in his own age and subsequently than that which was concerned with Education" (v).

⁴ Lucien Febvre has rightly observed: "There is not one phrase that Erasmus employs...that is not susceptible of two interpretations thoroughly different in spirit. Which is to say that people find in Erasmus--and this was already true in his own time--what is in themselves. The orthodox found their orthodoxy, the Reformed found their Reformation, the skeptics found their irony. This does not preclude the existence of an Erasmian way of thinking..." (Febvre 1982:325). Anthony Levi recognized Erasmus's "knack, and even a hobby, of insinuating what he felt he wanted to say, and, while making himself vulnerable to theological *odium*, avoiding any overt statement that could be construed as heretical" (Levi 1974:15). It is this subtlety, perhaps the hallmark of Erasmianism, that inspired Luther to say, "Erasmus is an eel. No one but Christ can catch hold of him" (Augustijn 1988:224).

⁵ Yet, most studies treating the roots of biblical criticism, such as V.P. Furnish's (1974) otherwise fairly complete study, ignore the contributions of

Erasmus, alone in the sixteenth-century, was motivated to the revolutionary act of being the first to substitute the Greek New Testament of the Eastern catholic church for the Latin Vulgate of the West. Concentrating on the consequences of this for the history of Biblical criticism has allowed me to be selective in my treatment of him. Consequently, a rather radical Erasmus emerges when full attention is given to an act that at the time was seen as a threat to the very dogmatic foundation of the Roman Catholic Church.⁶

Furthermore, Erasmus was not motivated in his interest to replace the Latin New Testament of a thousand year reign in the Western Church, with the Greek New Testament, solely by canons of disinterested philology. As C.H. Turner recognized, he was as "dominated by controversial almost as much as by scientific motives," and "the Greek Testament might have become accessible in print some years earlier and with much less friction, if a good many of its enthusiasts had not taken every opportunity of belittling the Vulgate by comparison" (Turner 1924:7).

Turner's point was that, had the task not been entered from the motive of theological conflict, perhaps a recension of the Greek text could have been produced which, ironically, would have much more closely confirmed the Latin

both Valla and Erasmus. Furthermore, there is also a tendency on the part of some, such as Klauber/Sunshine (1990), to trace the roots of biblical criticism to Lelio Sozzini (1525-63) and Fausto Sozzini (1539-1604), his nephew, as the prime movers, rather than Erasmus, who ante-dated them both in his critical work. On the other hand, Jerry Bentley (1976); (1977); (1978); (1983); and recently, Henning Graf Reventlow (1985) have correctly discovered the roots in Erasmus.

⁶ While Bentley (1983) made significant strides in establishing this point an even more concentrated study has recently appeared, Coogan, *Erasmus, Lee and the Correction of the Vulgate: The Shaking of the Foundations* (1992).

Vulgate, such as nineteenth and twentieth century scholars have produced, based on older MSS than those used by Erasmus:

No doubt the defenders of the Vulgate were very ignorant and very irritating to a learned critic. But it is no use overlooking the fact that, on the question which was the better text of the two, the ignorant people were right and the critic was wrong (Turner:ibid)⁷.

D'Amico adds further to this, contrasting Erasmus's approach to text criticism with that of Erasmus's student, Beatus Rhenanus:

Erasmus did not develop a theory that incorporated textual criticism into a general view of the past. His practical attitude toward textual criticism and editing generally betrayed a limited historical orientation. Restored texts were good things because of the information they provide and the aid they offer for stylistic development. But to establish the past in its integrity, whether historically or through the restored ancient archetype, was not one of Erasmus's chief concerns (D'Amico 1988:38).⁸

Rice adds the observation that,

Erasmus was more of a philologist and a rhetorician than a thinker. His contributions to humanistic education, to textual criticism, and his

⁷Turner may have slightly over stated the case regarding the Vulgate because of his own convictions regarding the "Western" text as found in the Latin manuscripts. Kilpatrick assessed his legacy in the following terms: "We may suspect that Turner's own interests had encouraged him to develop his research in the way he did. His work on Cyprian, the Latin versions of the *Shepherd* of Hermas, the Latin collections of Canons and other material had given him a great respect for the Latin versions and manuscripts" (Orchard and Longstaff 1978:149). Nevertheless, Turner's point is generally correct that the *Vulgata Latina* was not always wrong and the Greek text was not always correct.

⁸This was not absolutely the case, however, since his omission of the *comma Johanneum*, as well as his resorting to the Greek New Testament were attempts to recapture an *historically* earlier and therefore *purver* form of the Christian Faith. In fact, the radicalness of this omission can hardly be appreciated today but it helps to put it into perspective when one notes that even Lorenzo Valla, who was suspected of antitrinitarian leanings, would not omit this passage in his *Adnotationes*, because perhaps, as Bentley suggests, he "considered it too impolitic to meddle with the proof-text for a doctrine so important to the Roman Church as that of the Trinity (Bentley, 1983:44-45). Not so for Erasmus.

interpretation of Greek culture must be treated with some reserve (Rice 1969:183).

Erasmus's supreme practical concern was to posit a *Greek* textual standard in opposition to the *Latin*-reading religious *status quo*. He confessed that "he plunged into the study of Greek in order to achieve 'a solid glory, something I see few men have done' and to cover with shame those who ridiculed him as a mere orator" (Tracy 1972:61).⁹

I will call attention to one possible influence on Erasmus, which may have contributed to pushing him outside of the ecclesiastical mainstream, thus equipping him with the special boldness and fitted temperament to replace the Latin Vulgate of the Western Church with the Greek New Testament of the Eastern Church. But the essence of my contention will be to show that by replacing the Latin New Testament with the Greek (usually by implication when offering arguments for correcting the *Vulgata* in his *Annotationes*) he also placed the Bible, for the first time, within a non-dogmatic hermeneutical context, thus precipitating a view of the Bible as a religious, rather than a sacred text.¹⁰

⁹ Barth provides another example of how family dishonour, or personal dishonour can provide the high motivation for theological ground breaking. He confessed in his lectures on Schleiermacher that part of his motivation for writing his commentary on Romans stemmed from such considerations: "Only now did I begin to regard my father, who had died in 1912 with, as I put it in the preface to the first edition of *Romans*, 'respect and gratitude' theologically as well. He belonged to those who were disregarded and slightly disdained in the theological lecture halls and seminar rooms of his time. And regardless of the warning at the end of Mozart's *Seraglio* that 'nothing is so hateful as revenge,' I will not conceal the fact that for a moment the thought raced through my head that I could and would now exact a kind of reprisal from those who had placed my father in the shadows, even though he had been just as learned as they (only from a different point of view) (Barth 1982:264-265).

¹⁰According to the definitions I offer in my introduction.

B. Erasmus's Illegitimacy

"Erasmus, Desiderius--Humanist, classical and patristic scholar, first editor of the Greek New Testament [sic]; b. Rotterdam, Holland, Oct. 27, 1466; d. Basel, Switzerland, July 12, 1536. He was an illegitimate child...". So begins the entry treating Erasmus in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (NCE, Vol. 5:508).

Illegitimacy in the fifteenth century was not, of course, a precondition to obscurity, as the lives of Pope Clement VII, Leonardo da Vinci, and Don Juan make clear (Dolan, 1964:17). In fact, one of Erasmus's earliest heroes shared such a beginning with him, the Dutch Humanist, Rudolphus Frisius Agricola, from whom Erasmus took his foundational category of *philosophia Christi* (Levi 1971:33).¹¹

1. Agricola's Influence

The visit of Agricola to his school at Deventer had a profound effect on the young Erasmus. Erasmus considered his school masters, Hegius and Sinthis, Agricola's "intellectual sons and he, [Erasmus] through them, the grandson of this Northern scholar who came back from Italy via Deventer trailing clouds of glory and of Greek" (Phillip:3). More than just a model, Agricola must have taken on life-giving significance for Erasmus: a new parentage; a new brotherhood; a window to a new world-view that could bear up under a lifetime of scorn and ignominy resulting from the circumstances of Erasmus's birth. Mangan hints at this:

Agricola, visiting the school...examined the work of Erasmus, and was so struck with its general excellence that he caressed him, and predicted that if he continued he would be a great man some day. Praise from this celebrated scholar must have moved Erasmus deeply, for he took many occasions in

¹¹ Found in Agricola's *De formando studio* 1484.

after life to praise the memory of this great and kindly man (Mangan, 1928: Vol.1, 280, n. 12).¹²

2. Scaliger's Attack

That Erasmus must have suffered dearly in his youth from the whispers surrounding his illegitimacy became publicly evident at the very end of his life. Mansfield reminds us that, "Erasmus lived an embattled life. Born illegitimate, he had to find his own footing in a world where family connection counted above everything else" (Mansfield 1979:3). Erasmus's worst fears were realized when as a result of his attack on the Ciceronians--those pedants who slavishly attempted to reproduced Cicero's Latinity--he angered one of his most vociferous critics, Julius Caesar Scaliger.

A retired soldier, Scaliger saw himself as the arch-saviour of Cicero and his *cultus* in Italy, from the abuse handed out by Erasmus against the "Ciceronians."¹³ When Erasmus did not respond to Scaliger's first "Oration" against him (Erasmus in fact thought Aleander wrote it) Scaliger wrote another after reading Erasmus's comments on the first, found in a private letter. Erasmus made the mistake of calling the author "mad." For this he paid dearly.

¹² Schoeck doubts that this ever happened but offers no compelling reasons for doubting its veracity, *cf.* Schoeck (1988:41)

¹³ On Erasmus's relationship with the Southern humanists see D'Amico (1983:138-143).

Scaliger made inquiries regarding Erasmus's background and wrote the following in a letter to Le Ferron, addressing Erasmus:

Did I, in truth, lie because in that oration I did not venture, you grovelling wretch, to call you a bastard? Although this was true, it was not certainly established; so it did not become me to publish what might have been a falsehood. Erasmus, you were then and are now a bastard. Thus many of my comrades in arms told me but I did not trust the rumours. Nor did I throw it in your face lest the true and proven things I told about you might have been discredited. Now, however, your fellow countrymen and some of your neighbours who are men of character and distinction have told me that you are of incestuous birth and of sordid parents, your father being a priest and your mother a prostitute. Further, your father after having been punished several times for his disorderly life, and found incorrigible was finally banished from his country (Hall, 1951:113).

Scaliger had more than a passing interest in Erasmus's bloodline: he was notorious for exerting great pains to prove that he himself was of a princely lineage. By "*incesto*" Scaliger had reference to the violation of canon law, *damnatoque coitu*, committed by Erasmus's father, as a priest, deacon or subdeacon (Mangan, Vol.1:5).

It is uncertain if Erasmus lived to read this. Scaliger later did some grovelling of his own, expressing regret, after Erasmus was dead, that he had attacked the Dutchman. Scaliger's son was so chagrined by this affair he attempted to buy up all published copies of both attacks and the final letter, asking that they be destroyed after his death. They were instead published.

C. Illegitimacy a Hindrance to Gaining Benefices

If a foe such as Scaliger could find such information so late in Erasmus's life it certainly must have been common public knowledge in Erasmus's youth and after, in and around Gouda, Erasmus's home town. In fact, Erasmus reflects on the Hollanders in a telling passage:

The number of those distinguished in letters is not great, perhaps because the life is too easy and perhaps because this people consider integrity more estimable than erudition (Bainton 1970:19).

There are other indications that his humiliating background was a recurring psychological problem, which Mangan may be overstating when he says it was "a thing of shame which poisoned his whole life" (Mangan, Vol.1:4). Periodically he would change the date of his birth.¹⁴ In his *Compendium Vitae*, supposedly written for a friend, Conrad Goclenius, under the conditions that it be kept in confidence, the circumstances of Erasmus's birth were fabricated (Olin, 1965:22-30). Whether this was actually written by Erasmus, or fabricated by a friend, it "represented a concern for Erasmus' reputation and a desire to dissipate scandal about him in intellectual circles in Leiden, Gouda, and Rotterdam" (Mansfield, 1979:126). Olin remarked on this account of Erasmus's birth, "Deeply sensitive to the illegitimacy of his birth, Erasmus in later years may have depicted his origin and family background in somewhat imaginative terms. But even this is revealing, and it would be wrong to dismiss the memoir as a fabrication" (Olin, 1965:23).

And then there were his dealings with Julius II who was Pope during his stay in Rome. In 1509 Erasmus expressed his disgust for Julius in the immortal words from *Moria*:

This the holy fathers in Christ, who are in fact the vicars of Christ, launch against none so savagely as those who at the devil's prompting seek to nibble away and reduce the patrimony of Peter.... Fired with zeal for Christ they will fight to preserve them with fire and sword, and Christian blood flows freely while they believe they are the defenders, in the manner of the apostles, of the Church, the bride of Christ, through having boldly routed those whom they call her foes. As if indeed the deadliest enemies of the Church were not these impious pontiffs who allow Christ to be forgotten through their silence, fetter him with their mercenary laws, misrepresent

¹⁴This has led A.C.F. Koch (1969) to a quite strained interpretation of Erasmus's motives for this. It is much more easily accounted for when the circumstances of Erasmus's birth and its impact are fully appreciated. Albert Rabil, Jr. (1972:3), usually of sound judgement, seems to have been convinced by Koch.

him with their forced interpretations of his teaching, and slay him with their noxious way of life! (Erasmus, 1971:180-181)¹⁵

Three years earlier it was to this man, sitting in the fisherman's chair, that Erasmus was compelled to divulge the circumstances of his birth. This, in order to gain a dispensation from the dreaded indictment of medieval canon law, which because of his illegitimacy prohibited him from accepting ecclesiastical benefices.

He told Julius that he was born out of wedlock, *not* that his father was a priest. This meant two things: there were those raising the issue of his birth, barring him from the benefices; and, by divulging the issue to "the Warring Pope" he was certainly exposed to the scorn and whispers of the Vatican court. The pope granted this, though Erasmus never used the dispensation.¹⁶

The issue arose again in 1517. With a new Pope on the throne, Leo X, one more compatible with Erasmus's own agenda, Erasmus made yet another petition. This time he acknowledged his father's clerical status. He again asked for a full dispensation to receive benefices and to abandon his monk's garb which he had already given up, illegally, probably since his first visit to England (Mangan, Vol 2:63-64). He also wanted to be delivered from the requirement of returning to the monastery, according to his original vow. For a price, all of this was granted. He was finally freed from dependence on, or responsibility to, the ecclesiastical hierarchy

¹⁵ There was also, of course, Erasmus's *Julius exclusus*, on which few, if any, have doubts concerning Erasmian authorship. On this consult, *The Julius Exclusus of Erasmus* with a critical introduction by J.K. Sowards (1968).

¹⁶ Mangan suggests that since Erasmus was duplicitous in not providing all the circumstances of his birth to Julius, if he had used the dispensation he might have been challenged regarding his father's clerical status. Erasmus would then have been found guilty of holding back the truth in his original request (Mangan, Vol. 1:61).

Furthermore, we know the issue of his birth did not die with Erasmus. Within a month of Erasmus's death, an admirer, Fridericus Nausea (1480-1552), published his commemorative *Monodia*. In this work,

Nausea touches lightly on the strictly biographical problems. Erasmus' illegitimacy, which Scaliger denounced with savage rancour and which later biographers were to handle with differing degrees of incredulity, embarrassment, and candour, was covered by a veil of words: only the worthiest of parents could have produced such a son; the fruit proves the quality of the tree; in any case, true nobility stems not from his parents but from the man himself.... (Mansfield 1979:9)

While Bainton (1988:19-20), Smith (1923:6) et al. dance around the circumstances of Erasmus's birth with a sensitive Protestant deference, the Roman Catholic Mangan, with all the searching scrutiny of a sibling, provides the most detail in an unvarnished telling of this aspect of Erasmus's life, concluding insightfully,

This, we think, is the secret of his terrible animosity against those priests and monks who, by their disordered lives, were the cause of shame and misery to others...(Mangan, Vol.1:6).

Christopher Hollis, another Roman Catholic interpreter of Erasmus, makes further observations on this theme:

Erasmus, always sensitive concerning his illegitimacy, tried to comfort himself with the belief that he was, as it were, only illegitimate *per accidens*. But the wish was father to the thought.... The question is of more than a merely scandalous interest. For, as will be found, it was to be one of Erasmus's most frequent contentions that the vow of celibacy imposed upon the priest a burden too grievous for human nature to bear, and that it would be best to abandon the experiment of a celibate priesthood. If we can believe that Erasmus was himself the victim of priestly incontinence, his passion is much more easily intelligible (Hollis 1933:14-15).

Why then has only Mangan and Hollis made the probable connection between the circumstances of Erasmus's birth and its influence as at least one contributing factor in alienating him from the *status quo* of the Roman Catholic hierarchy and dogma? Phillips says only in passing that Erasmus's father, "scholar turned priest, has not perhaps received his due in considerations about Erasmus's youth," contributing "illegitimacy to Erasmus's sea of troubles"

(Phillips, 1970:2). Perhaps the thought of venturing into the murky waters of psychohistory--a highly debated approach to biography--has blocked the way (Johnson 1977).

Nevertheless, being sensitive to this factor may help to provide some insight into Erasmus's gradually emerging agenda, beginning with his monastic days at Steyn.

It will be a subtext of this thesis that it has been the marginalized, dissenting and non-conformist traditions since the Reformation that have tended to pioneer in the practice of Biblical criticism, both because they have no overt sense of allegiance to the orthodox *status quo*; and because the desire to attain religious toleration has tended to push them to challenge, by means of Biblical criticism, the political jurisdiction of the religious orthodoxy establishment. Working as a non-partisian philologist, marginalized and alienated to some extent by the circumstances of his birth, Erasmus would seem to be an early, howbeit cautious, expression of both impulses.¹⁷

¹⁷ Woodward has aptly captured Erasmus's unique (for the sixteenth century) platform, so easily misunderstood by a less than sympathetic reader: "Erasmus can only be called a coward by those to whom partisanship is the one note of courage" (Woodward 1904:25). As Bainton rightly observed, Erasmus was the first to make a distinction between the *fundamenta* and the *adiaphora* for purposes of religious toleration, arguing as later antitrinitarians would, "The sum of our religion is peace and unanimity, but these can scarcely stand unless we define as little as possible, and in many things leave each one free to follow his own judgment" (Bainton 1988:224). One of these non-essentials for Erasmus was the Trinity (Bainton:226). While he certainly made certain to submit his final opinions to the authority of the *consensus Ecclesiae* (cf. McConica 1969) with regard to such issues as Arianism, it was not always so clear to him just what was the consensus of the early church since sometimes the Arians outnumbered the Trinitarians (cf. Tracy 1981).

C. Monastic Days

With Agricola before him as a towering father-figure/model Erasmus no doubt found inspiration to transform his monastic environment into his personal haven for the development of humanistic studies. Kaufman observed,

Although he later alledged that his guardians had pressured him, at the time he was probably compelled more by the leisure and literary culture afforded by the cloister.... Erasmus, when we first hear from him, has apparently mistaken the pursuit of secular learning and the conveniences permitted him in his retreat for the religious life and devotion customarily expected of medieval monks (Kaufman 1982:113-114).

Erasmus recreated the classical world in his cell, saturating his mind and spirit with Greek and Roman orators, poets and philosophers. Tracy relates, "Becoming disaffected with monastic life, he sought to form a circle of literary disciples who would find solace in friendship and common studies" (Tracy:11).

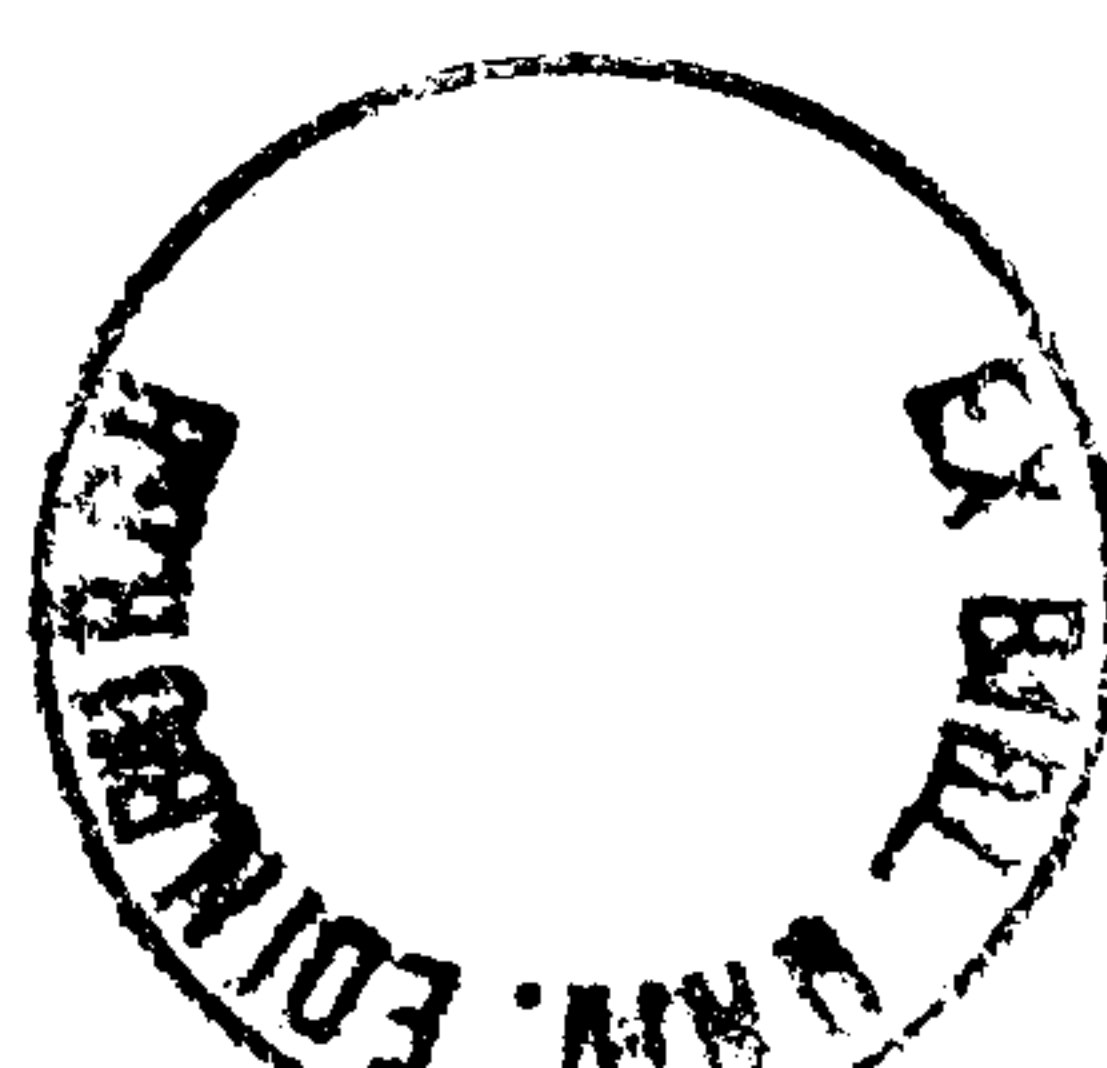
This, no doubt, provided him with a new point of reference from which he could escape the disapprobation of society and the inculcation of the canon law. DeMolen observes,

It seems obvious from the earliest correspondence that Erasmus turned the novitiate into a classroom and diverted the unhappiness that characterized his personal life into a passionate pursuit of good letters.... Steyn offered Erasmus the opportunity to effect a reformation in the curriculum pursued by the canons, but few of them were equal to it (DeMolen 1987:180).

Erasmus himself records,

Some secret natural impulse drove me to good literature. Discouraged even by my masters, I stealthily drank in what I could from whatever books came to my hand; I practiced my pen; I challenged my comrades to enter the lists with me.... (Rabil, 1972:6-7)¹⁸

¹⁸Though they are literally worlds apart in many respects one nevertheless finds fascinating parallels in the emergence of this sixteenth-century Greek Lucian and the nineteenth-century Greek Dionysus, Friedrich Nietzsche. Though Nietzsche was drawn to a dramatically different aspect of classical pagan thought, he, too, was driven by it away from his pious Lutheran roots, as I believe Erasmus was from the principles of late medieval scholasticism and the *Devotio Moderna* (Hyma, 1930:181). The grandson and son of Lutheran pastors,



While in the monastery Erasmus's primary inspiration came from reading classical authors, not theology. He writes a friend in 1489,

My authorities in poetry are Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Juvenal, Statius, Martial, Claudian, Persius, Lucian, Tibullus and Propertius; in prose, Cicero, Quintilian, Sallust, Terence. Then, for the observance of elegance, there is no one in whom I have so much confidence as Lorenzo Valla, who is

in search of a new identity within the walls of the highly charged environment of the nineteenth century German academy, Nietzsche, too, exchanged his parochial Christianity for the calling of the Muses. With all the zeal of a convert, like Erasmus, he attempted to take his friends along with him. A classmate recalls, "Nietzsche's personality had exerted a strong influence during the six years of our life together.... Since he feared that I might revert to theology, he constantly urged me...to strip off the theological bearskin, as he later once expressed it, and to act like a young philological lion" (Gilman 1987:25). Erasmus had prodded his closest friend, Servatius Rogerus, toward classical literature in a similar vein: "there is nothing that does not encourage you to apply yourself to study...it seems to me that you have incentives enough to cultivate letters. See that you shake off all the remnants of laziness and languor that have plagued you hitherto" (CE Vol.1:13). Neither Erasmus nor Nietzsche could be dispassionate about classical thought. For both it provided, I believe, a distinctive identity, allowing them to transcend their own roots. Concomitant with this new identity, both came to feel a call to project programmes for transvaluating religion, social order and culture in the direction of classical thought--very different aspects of classical thought, for sure. Mansfield remarks that Erasmus was a "publicist for a renewal and vast reconstruction of Christian society," and as such "he was bound to arouse enmities, to irritate vested interests, to provoke the defenders of entrenched positions and the apologists for established ways" (Mansfield 1979:3). Phillips remarked that Erasmus's "enthusiasm for the work of restoration [was] linked continually with hopes for the young, with the vision of a new age" (Phillips:17). The great irony in all this is that both men wanted to implement aspects of pagan thought against the perceived "barbarism" (Erasmus) and "philistinism" (Nietzsche) of institutional Christianity and the resultant Christian cultures of their day. Erasmus, the advocate of the hopeful, highwater mark of classical Platonic/Stoic morality, reflected the optimism of the Renaissance; Nietzsche, the advocate of the Dionysian principle came to subsume everything to the one value of the "will to power," reflecting the onset of modernity's existential inclination toward despair.

unrivalled both in the sharpness of his intelligence and the tenacity of his memory. Whatever has not been committed to writing by those I have named, I confess I dare not bring into use (Rabil: 8-9).

In a very early composition, *On Contempt of the World* (1488 or 89), written by him shortly after entering the monastery, he reflected an early affection for the life of a monk, employing seventy quotations from classical authors with only five from the Bible (Hyma:179). In the first edition of his *On the Right Method of Instruction*, written in 1497, "There is nothing on the Bible, the Christian fathers, or the Christian poets" (Rabil:31).¹⁹

No doubt, Erasmus envisioned the monastery as a possible centre to realize a revived sense of academy--not in the sense of the medieval university, dominated by scholastic dogma;²⁰ nor like the Reformed academy that would emerge in Geneva under Calvin giving expression to Protestant dogma;²¹ but

¹⁹ Fourteen years later, in 1511, he would "Christianize" the work recommending "the Greek and Latin fathers, the Platonic philosophers, and the Christian poets," warning also against immoral texts in classical literature (Rabil:31).

²⁰ Cf. Evans (1980). Tracy has noted "The founders of colleges at medieval universities, from Robert of Sorbonne to Jan Standonk, presumed an essential monastic notion of moral training. The student was expected to submit his will to the rules of the college, like the monk to the rules of his monastery, in order to be disciplined on the practice of virtue. Humanist educational theory, by contrast, rested on optimistic premises. The path to virtue lay not in submission to authority but rather in the unfolding of moral possibilities latent in human personality" (62).

²¹ Contra Bouwsma's identifying of Calvin as an "Erasmian" after becoming a Reformer (cf. Bouwsma, 1988:14). Calvin's theology put a great distance between himself and Erasmus. Certainly humanistic studies were pursued at Geneva, but always in the context of and in service to theological dogma. van Gelder has correctly noted: "The whole distance separating him [Calvin] from the humanistic view, and his relationship with the orthodoxy of those days were already shown clearly by Calvin when in 1533 he defined the *philosophia christiana* (opposite Erasmus' *philosophia Christi*).... Here Calvin appears to view Christian religion as a doctrine concerned with personal

something akin to the atmosphere of the modern university, free of dogmatic necessity. Kaufman again:

One looks in vain in Erasmus's *De contemptu mundi* for an inventory of traditional ascetic virtues. Tranquillity, peace of mind, freedom have supplanted obedience, poverty, celibacy, and constant prayer. Still, this is not a sign of irreligion. Erasmus broadly conceived of religion as the pursuit of knowledge in God's service, and he yearned for worthy men to join him in a community of scholars sheltered from worldly concerns by Steyn and by other monasteries in the Low Countries (Kaufman:114).

In fact, great strides were made in this direction, so that, "all the brothers began to devote themselves to study and Steyn was being converted into a veritable university" (Bainton 1988:35).

When it became apparent that this alien academy was emerging within the walls of the monastery the authorities stepped in and ordered Erasmus to stop:

His correspondence is full of exhortations to study and fellowship. But years passed and the 'community' did not materialize.... his superiors grew intolerant of his pursuits and they possibly tried to suppress the interests that originally led their young colleague to Steyn (Kaufman: 114-115).

This would be the first important confrontation between the Church and Erasmus's quest for "academic freedom."

salvation through the mystery of Christ, being a long way from the view taken by the moderns at that time, namely that religion is above all a philosophy of life.... Calvin seldom quotes from the classical authors and then it is often to show their anti-Christian nature or their lack of religious basis" (van Gelder 1964:271-273). Strictly speaking neither Calvin nor his academy could be called "Erasmian," though they were both greatly indebted to the tools of humanism in general.

D. *Antibarbari* and the Development of the *Philosophia Christi*

Erasmus "revenged himself" (Bainton 1988:35) writing his *Antibarbari* ("Against the Barbarians"). This work decisively placed Erasmus out of the pale of earlier forms of Christian humanism. Here he advocated not just "the expression of perennial Christian humanism in the 'idiom of the Renaissance,'" (Boyle:9), but rather a significant departure from it.

Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle has interpreted this work as placing Erasmus beyond what we traditionally understand as Christian humanism. Like certain strands of early Alexandrian patristic thought Erasmus is found giving a renewed emphasis to a natural theology, viewing it as a result of common grace:

For Erasmus, philosophy was for the pagans of antiquity, just as the Mosaic law was for the Hebrews, the instrument which Christ dispensed to men for the knowledge of God before his advent in flesh among them. Philosophy was a manifestation of the covenant in common grace between Creator and creature (Boyle, 1981:17).

Tracy concurs, arguing that Erasmus

makes no clear distinction between nature and grace. If the term 'grace' is not applied to the gifts with which man is endowed by the Creator, it should be. Since nature itself is a gift of God, no Augustinian need be concerned if someone says the process of salvation is initiated by human will rather than by grace.... Erasmus seems unaware that Pelagius had used the same argument against Augustine (Tracy:231).

Boyle adds further regarding Erasmus's disputation with Luther in *Diatriba*, that Erasmus "argues in elucidating his inductive method that he did not expressly state the word 'grace' because he had not yet distinguished that term into its range of operations, from the natural to the justifying" (Boyle 1984:63, n.23). She assesses that later, in *Hyperaspistes*,

Erasmus himself considered it probable that in those lacking such particular grace as the orthodox professed, the power of the will was not utterly extinguished, but rather was inefficacious toward the morally upright. By the law of nature, the will of the ancient philosophers, for example, was

probably inclined in some manner to the good, but inefficacious for eternal salvation unless through faith grace should befall them (Ibid.:72).²²

Certainly, as Boyle acknowledges, in some respects this reflects the early patristic practice of adapting the pagan philosophy of the *Logos* to a notion of common grace, to which Erasmus is but returning.²³ The early fathers, however, normally attributed this wisdom among the pagans to a reading of the Hebrew Scriptures.²⁴ For Boyle, "Erasmus exceeds the tradition of Christian humanism when in *Antibarbari* he welcomes pagans to the divine economy" (Boyle:10).²⁵ The implications of this for Erasmus are what sets him apart from both the early Alexandrians as well as from Augustine.

The contrast can be seen between Erasmus and the two greatest theologians in the Western Church, both of whom were also greatly influenced by pagan literature: Jerome is rebuked and scourged by God in a dream for

²² This was also the position of Clement of Alexandria as well, *cf. Strom* i. 7. 38. McConica adds: "Erasmus' debt to Stoic thought was immense, and he fully shared the Stoic conviction that nature is animated by universal reason. At root, moreover, man's nature is good, although it is corrupted by original sin, but through the will of God and his own free will submitted to the discipline of reason, man can realize his inner aptitude for regeneration and transformation" (McConica 1969:90). Here one hears echos also of one of Erasmus' favorite fathers, Origen.

²³ *Cf.* Justin Martyr, *Ap.* i. 46; ii. 8. 1-3; 10. 8; 13. Clement of Alexandria, *Protr.* 117; *Strom.* vi. 8. 67. i. 7.38 and Origen, *Comm. in Joh.* i.34. 246; *de Princ.* i.3. 1 f.

²⁴ Clement also used the argument that the fallen angels communicated the heavenly mysteries to the daughters of men whom they had taken for wives, *Strom.* v. 1. 10.

²⁵ Whether he actually exceeds the earlier patristic precedent on this point is rightly disputed by M.A. Screech who cites parallels with Clement of Alexandria, Justin Martyr and even Abelard, *cf.* Screech (1983). Perhaps it is safer to say Erasmus was unique in his own Renaissance age on this point, as compared with Jerome and Augustine, *cf.* Boyle (1981:9).

Cicero and so puts him away.²⁶ Augustine in later life writes his *Retractationes*.²⁷

On the other hand, Erasmus,

Has Christ allot in *Antibarbari* the historical achievement 'nearest to the highest good' of his Incarnation not to the Hebrews in their law and prophets, but to the pagans of Greece and Rome in their learning (Boyle:12).

In his *Colloquies* Erasmus can speak, in the person of Eusebius, of Cicero's works as "divinely inspired," (Phillips 1970:28) while referring to the Hebrew Bible as "those Jewish books," which if need be, could be destroyed in order to preserve the peace of the Church.²⁸ Furthermore, Spitz indicates that for

²⁶ In his letter to Julia Eustochium Jerome warns her against reading Horace, Vergil, Cicero and such authors who would be incompatible with the Christian Faith. It appears he retained this opinion for about fifteen years after which time he probably returned to reading the classics from time to time (Kelly 1975:42-43).

²⁷ "He afterwards, in his *Retractations*, withdrew many things contained in them [his earlier works], like the Platonic view of the preexistence of the soul, and the Platonic idea that the acquisition of knowledge is a recollection or excavation of the knowledge hidden in the mind. The Philosopher in him afterwards yielded more and more to the theologian" (Schaff 1956:14). C.N. Cochrane sums up the significance of Augustine's *Retractationes*, in the following terms: "With a curious and disarming candour, the product of a detachment amounting almost to selflessness, Augustine surveys the development of his mind as he sees it mirrored in the works of forty-two years. And what he therein discerns is a progressive emancipation from pagan ideology, the *pessima consuetudo* of thought and expression in which he had grown up.... Exact to the point of meticulousness...he urges the need of a purged and purified language to clothe the new way of thought" (Cochrane 1944:383). For a further contrast between Augustine and Erasmus on the value and place of classical learning *cf.* Boyle (1981:5-25).

²⁸ Along with his dislike of the ceremonial, part of Erasmus's aversion to the Hebrew Bible might be attributed to his inability to learn Hebrew. Or it may have worked the other way round, his dislike for the Old Testament may have worked against his learning Hebrew. On this see Hall (92-93)

Erasmus the Church fathers were second only in importance to Scripture (Spitz:214).²⁹

Erasmus's classical ideal of *humanitas* even led him to think that perhaps "God was better represented in some pagan fables--false as they were--than in Old Testament stories of an angry and thundering Yahweh." (Tracy 1967:12)

More than just a thoroughgoing defense of classical studies, here Erasmus reflected what would become his mature position, "not merely allow[ing] that Christians may study pagans, but rather insist[ing] that they must" (Boyle 1981:9). Certainly this is because classical "grammar and rhetoric...aid him in the interpretation of the sacred text and in its persuasion to men" (Boyle 1981:18). Pagan wisdom/morality, however, in a sense, also served to normalize Jesus and the Gospel, which epitomized ~~of~~ the Logos found also in pagan learning from which he abstracted his *philosophia Christi*. His argument went like this:

There are innumerable things which we hold in common with pagan lovers of wisdom, but this does not diminish the authority of our truths, *but rather confirms it*, because through the light of nature [not the Hebrew Bible] those philosophers saw something of our truths, which Scripture hands us. [emphasis mine] (Boyle:18)

He offers the obligatory qualification that their revelation is fragmentary and so it must be brought to the bar of Scripture, but in practice it is precisely that which pagan wisdom confirms in the Christian Faith that bears a close resemblance to Erasmus's *philosophia Christi*.³⁰ There is a sense then in matters of

²⁹ According to Boyle's assessment, perhaps the order might be, 1) N.T.; 2) Pagan authors of Greece and Rome; 3) O.T.; 4) Church Fathers.

³⁰ Spitz remarked, "Erasmian spiritualism did not go beyond an almost Platonic and moralistic interpretation of St. Paul. Christ is the victor of the spirit over nature, of the heavenly over the earthly, of freedom over law.... The real world of ideas outside the cave of this world is the spiritual kingdom of Christ" (Spitz:220).

practical importance, in which, like the father who came to have the most influence on Erasmus, Origen, Erasmus is found "paganizing Christian mysteries."³¹

Erasmus had an earlier model for this in Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) who through the light of Neoplatonism argued in his *Confirmatio Christianorum per Socratica* that Socrates did, indeed, *confirm* Christ (Seznec 1953:98).³²

An interesting example of Erasmus at work in this project of "paganizing Christian mysteries," in order to confirm the essence of Christianity by means of the natural theology of classical wisdom, can be seen in his *Contemptus Mundi* (1521). E. Rummel demonstrated that Erasmus used as his model for

³¹ Tracy has sensed this, remarking, "One's final impression must be that Erasmus has reluctantly and without too much success attempted to superimpose a Pauline theology on a moral optimism derived from the classics and the Greek Fathers" (Tracy 231). But perhaps it is more accurate to say the classical traditions were superimposed on Paul and Christ, as Levi seems to argue: "Erasmus's early dependence on the Platonist tradition.... explains much about Erasmus's preference for Origen and the more Plotinian works of the early Augustine.... The achievement of...Erasmus in particular, was to be the anchoring of the values which were transmitted by the Platonist tradition and might otherwise have seemed heterodox in their implications firmly in the text of the Church's own revelation" (Levi 1971:24-25).

³² Seznec explains the hermeneutic of Ficino and other humanists of the Florentine Academy as follows: "Interpreting by means of symbols, in fact, made it possible not only to discern a lofty wisdom beneath fictions of the most diverse character and the most unedifying appearance: it further led to a grasp of the fundamental relationship between this profane wisdom (variable in its outward form, but immutable in its teaching) and the wisdom of the Bible. Just as Plato accords with Moses, and Socrates "confirms" Christ, so Homer's voice is that of a prophet.... This will explain certain strange utterances, among them Erasmus' suggestion that more profit is perhaps to be derived from reading the literature of fable with its allegorical content in mind than from the Scriptures taken more literally" (Seznec 1953:98-99). Erasmus also quoted verbally from Ficino's translation of Plato in his *Enchiridion* (Levi 1971:24).

composing this, sometimes with exact verbal conformity, a letter from Eucherius, a fifth century Bishop of Lyons. Both works were intended to influence someone away from a secular to a contemplative, religious life. While, however,

Eucherius seeks his inspiration in the bible and gives his explanations a theological overtone, Erasmus relies on popular wisdom and the moral philosophy contained in classical literature. It is significant...Eucherius sees friendship as a gift of God...natural goodness as the result of divine grace...while Erasmus, dispensing with this metaphysical aspect, makes friendship appear a natural and characteristic human emotion, talent and inclinations a matter of good fortune. (Rummel, 1983:506)

Ironically, it was Eucherius's purpose in *his* letter to admonish his reader to abandon "the wisdom of ancient philosophy" in favour of the exclusive study of Christian doctrine.

The early emergence of a shared sense of academy in the monastery allowed Erasmus to taste the sweet results of seeing others animated, for a season, by *bonae litterae*. This surely fuelled his goal of creating such a community on a larger scale. Paul Joachimen, in his classic essay: "Humanism and the Development of the German Mind" (1972) has assessed this aspect of Erasmus's project as succinctly and as accurately as anyone. For this reason I quote him at length:

The question now was the reorganization of the entire western cultural community as represented in the *respublica christiana*--in other words, European culture *as a whole*. The lifework of Erasmus was directed toward the transformation of this *respublica christiana* in all three forms--a hierarchy, a sacramental institution, and an organic society--into a community of learning. The hierarchy was to become an institution for educating men to Christ, the sacramental institution a genuine Christian community, and the organic society a social ethic based on general agreement about the Christian purpose of society. All this was to be achieved by means of a fresh representation of Christ's teachings set against the background of the new understanding of antiquity. *Humanitas*, as a conception of life and learning, was to be related to a view of Christianity freed of all distortions and accretions. It was to become *humanitas christiana* (Joachimsen 1972:190-191).

How rewarding it must have been, therefore, when the most powerful printer in Europe, Aldus Manutius, agreed to become Erasmus's publisher.

Aldus invited him to come to Venice, where Erasmus joined his household, along with a group of other scholars, all of whom made up what Aldus called his "New Academy." In order to be part of this elite group one had to pledge to speak only in Greek at meals and special gatherings, fines being imposed for lapses in grammar (Rabil:66). There, Erasmus gained a genuine community contribution to his new edition of the *Adagia*.

It was while associated with another printer, however, the Froben press of Basel, that Erasmus formed an important and lasting working relationship with Beatus Rhenanus. Mansfield aptly assesses the importance of this relationship:

They were associated for five years in the Froben press in Basel. Beatus Rhenanus had already done editorial work for Estienne in Paris and Schürer in Strasbourg; he belonged to the world of the scholarly printers who offered a kind of alternative university to the lay, bourgeois society of the time. Between him and Erasmus there grew up a comradeship of work on this intellectual frontier (Mansfield:17).³³

But if Erasmus was to have the kind of impact on Christendom he envisioned, something had to be done on a grander scale. A popular and compelling contrast had to be made (now that the mass-media possibilities of the printing press were available), between the self-evident grandeur of classical wisdom and the barbarism of late medieval learning and religion. *Moria*, of course, became the answer.

Within the pages of this popular satire Erasmus emerged as the Christian Lucian, indicting every class and station of late medieval life. In contrast, the lowly Christ--the supremely *Socratic* Christ³⁴--was held up, behind whom

³³ For further information on the life and work of Rhenanus, see D'Amico (1988).

³⁴ The Socratic Christ image is found even more deliberately in Erasmus's adage *Sileni Alcibiadis* of the 1515 edition of the *Adagia* (Fokke 1977:244-245). Pelikan mentions Erasmus returning to the "Christian

Erasmus could repudiate all of European society in a single act of self-legitimizing self-preservation.³⁵ Phillips wrote that from Basel Erasmus

could criticise the world and its masters, turn the spotlight of his irony on the money-grubbing, and the exploiting of superstition, the abuse of power, characteristic of his time as of others, and build up for all to see a dream of peace...(Phillips 1981:56).

Erasmus's Christ resonates, here as in his other works, with the values Erasmus loved best from the classical world, over against the thousand year reign of the Christ of the Roman Church.³⁶ Tracy notes,

Socratism" of certain early church fathers (Pelikan, 1985:155-56). After Erasmus's death one of his earliest written tributes interpreted him as the Socrates of his age (Mansfield 10).

³⁵ On the concept of self-preservation see Pacini (1987). Perhaps Hollis was needlessly cruel but nevertheless close to the truth when he argued, "Erasmus had thought of an effective technique with which to challenge the great ones of the Church and he could not resist the temptation of exploiting it. He would contrast their magnificence and worldliness with the Gospel simplicity.... Nothing is easier than to write on a piece of paper that somebody else ought to model his life on that of Christ, nothing more absurd than to imagine that people who write like this are necessarily more Christlike than their neighbours. There never lived a man who would have more heartily disliked the simplicity of Apostolic life than Erasmus. When he wrote as a satirist, he criticised the lives of Churchmen as being too luxurious, but, when he wrote as a guest or a gastronomer, he invariably complained of the menu for being wholly insufficient" (Hollis 1933:121-22).

³⁶ McConica rightly observes, "Thus, despite the emphasis on fallen nature, it is less the redemptive than the ethical Christ who prevails in the Erasmian gospel. The continuous references to the 'example', the 'wisdom', and the 'teaching' of Christ, create a cumulative impression which cannot be explained simply as the substitution of a classical for a scholastic vocabulary. This aspect of his creed made possible the easy bridging of the gap between Christianity and pagan classicism, admitting the generalized classical view which informs his approach to educational and social problems" (McConica 1968:33-34). Reventlow concurs, commenting that while in Erasmus's *philosophia Christi*

As he shifted the major focus of his interest from the classics to theology, Erasmus interpreted scripture from the standpoint of *humanitas*. Christ himself, the perfect man, was a model of *humanitas*; he exemplified patience and mildness and gentleness, but not "spiritedness" (*animositas*).... In this situation *humanitas* became the positive norm against which the imperfection of Christian society could be measured (Tracy: 12).

The community of theologians felt the "bitterness, if not invective"

(Levi:41).³⁷

But the Church stood firm; the hierarchy intact; the *status quo* unscathed. There was yet no *institutional* academy to offer an alternative, just Erasmus boxing his own shadow. Moreover, for all his efforts, Erasmus won for himself the reputation of a dangerous, irreverent, anti-theological dissident.

The Church rested firmly on an unshaken hermeneutic, grounded upon the sacred text of the Latin Vulgate. The theologians acted the part of shamans, the *privileged interpreter* class. But as the ancient Platonic Academy had emptied the Greek Pantheon, Erasmus was soon to send shock waves up through the ecclesiastical structure, culminating in the dual legacies of the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment. He would do so by profaning the sacred text that lay at the foundation of this structure. Lorenzo Valla would lay the egg; Erasmus would hatch it.

"the notion of redemption through Christ is not fully absent...the role of Christ as teacher and model is by far the most important" (Reventlow 1985:42).

³⁷ The sting reaches to modern times for some. H. Jedin, in his *History of the Council of Trent*, mentions that it was not Erasmus's "shyness of technical terms, such as 'Hypostasis'" that brought suspicion upon him, it was the "far more dangerous" and "more deadly irony" of his *Praise of Folly*, wherein "he had exposed to ridicule persons and institutions which up till then had been held in reverence.... From such a spirit no genuine reform could proceed" (Jedin, 1957 I:160).

E. The Influence of Valla

As Agricola inspired Erasmus to embrace humanistic studies initially, Valla provided him with the final inspiration to launch his most revolutionary stratagem. Certainly the publishing of an edition of the Greek N.T. was not itself such a revolutionary act. In fact, Jimenez de Cisneros and a most distinguished assembly of scholars, who were also faithful churchmen, gathered at Alcalá, had already produced an edition by 1514.³⁸

The difference was that Erasmus, working independently, would produce his own Latin translation based on the Greek as a correction to the Latin Vulgate³⁹ (Screech, 1986:IX-XXIV). By contrast when the edition produced by the churchmen at Alcalá was completed, the editor referred to the Latin Vulgate in the Old Testament, placed between the Hebrew text on one side and the Greek text on the other as "Christ hanging between two thieves."⁴⁰

Though Valla was regarded as an "immoral pedant" by some churchmen (Bentley, 1977:11, n.9) Erasmus found in his *Adnotations* to the New Testament a method of approaching the Bible that would eventually drop the curtain on medieval exegesis. Reynolds and Wilson have significantly noted, "Lorenzo

³⁸ The *Complutensian Polyglot* printed between 1514 and 1517 but not published until 1521 or 1522. Cisneros invited Erasmus on two occasions to take part in the project but Erasmus declined both invitations (COE, Vol. 2:236).

³⁹ For an important essay offering a corrective to nearly all Erasmus literature on the date of Erasmus's Latin translation see Brown (1984:351-380).

⁴⁰ There was at least one editor, also profoundly influenced by Valla, who was of Erasmus's persuasion, Elio Antonia de Nebrija. Nebrija wanted to correct the Vulgate from the Greek but was forbidden to do so by Cardinal Cisneros. As a result Nebrija played only a marginal role in the project (COE, Vol. 3:10; Bentley, 1983:88-91).

Valla's *Adnotationes in Novum Testamentum*...treated the text of the Bible not as if it were sacred but like any other literary monument" (Reynolds/Wilson, 1974:142). Consequently, Valla was keen on pointing out that even in Jerome's day the Latin Bible was full of variant readings in the MSS; how much more so after a thousand years of mishandling by theologians (Bentley, 1977:12).

In approaching the text of the Vulgate as a philologist, Valla provided Erasmus with a mass of data revealing countless occasions of mistranslation from the Greek text in the Vulgate, leading to serious misunderstandings on the part of the theologians.⁴¹ "The temple of scripture leaks when it rains; it must needs be patched up" was Valla's sentiment (Bentley, 1977:12).

This attack on the sacred text of the Vulgate--for so were Valla's corrections perceived by much of the theological community--along with certain unguarded comments about Church teaching led to Valla's answering to the Inquisition in 1444 (COE, Vol. 3:373). He later made amends taking employment with the Curia and writing a defense of the Latin language⁴² and of the Church as guardians of true civilization⁴³ (COE, Vol 3:374).

⁴¹ For example, Thomas Aquinas interpreted "Sacramentum hoc magnum est," as a rendering of Τό μυστήριον τοῦτο μέγα ἐστίν at Ephesians 5:32 in the Vulgate as justification for marriage being one of the seven sacraments of the Church (Pelikan, 1985:153). Erasmus felt this a less than helpful rendering.

⁴² For Valla's support of the cultural ideology of Roman Humanism see D'Amico (1983:115-143).

⁴³ Erasmus, too, was given an opportunity to make a public affirmation of his final allegiance to the hierarchy of the Church when offered the cardinal's hat late in life, but unlike Valla declined the offer to align himself in any such official capacity.

Referred to as "Erasmus' Inaugural Lecture as Professor-at-large to Christendom" (Harbison 1956:85) Erasmus anticipated criticism from the Church when he published Valla's data in 1505:

As I was hunting last summer in an ancient library, for those coverts offer by far the most enjoyable sport, luck brought into my toils a prey of no ordinary importance: Lorenzo Valla's notes on the New Testament. At once I was eager to share it with the world of scholarship.... But I was a little put off, not only by the entrenched unpopularity of Valla's name, but by his subject as well, a subject which on the face of it is singularly apt to generate antagonism (CE Vol. 2:80).

Erasmus knows exactly who he will unsettle--the theologians:

I foresee that there may be some who having barely read the title of my work and before they learn what it is about will immediately cry 'O heaven and earth!' in the approved tragic fashion.... And I am inclined to believe that the most unpleasantly hostile demonstrations of all will be made by the theologians. They will say it is intolerable presumption in a grammarian, who has upset every department of learning, to let his impertinent pen loose on Holy Scripture itself.... But it will be said, it is sinful to change anything in the Holy Scripture; for no jot and tittle therein is without some special import (CE Vol.2:93; 95).

Rummel says of Erasmus's *Annotations*, which were modeled after Valla's example and appeared at the same time as his Greek New Testament,

They were not a biblical commentary in the usual sense, that is, they do not offer an interpretation of the historical and spiritual sense, backed up by the occasional antiquarian or philological explanation. In Erasmus' *Annotations* the priorities are reversed. He is primarily concerned with textual and literary criticism; exegetical material is added when necessary. Erasmus was an enthusiastic philologist but a reluctant theologian" (Rummel 1986:185).⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Renaudet assessed the significance of Erasmus's *Annotations*: "His commentary, broken up by long digressions, expresses a religious thought stripped of all reminiscences of theological and mystical notions from the Middle Ages, as well as of scholarly speculations of Italian humanism; it reduced itself to the 'philosophy of Christ,' a summary of the religious and moral propositions to be drawn from the Gospel and St. Paul, and sufficient to form a basis for that worshiping in spirit which he had proclaimed in the *Enchiridion* and which he thought could be reconciled easily with the fundamental spiritual principles of the ancient world" (Renaudet 1968:88).

In fact, Spitz records that Erasmus "emphatically refused the name of theologian for himself" (Spitz 1963:210).

How this new approach was perceived by the leading theologians of the day is typified in the remarks of Beda, representing the University of Paris:

The man who complains of the style in which holy books are written comes very close to Blasphemy; for he implies that God lacks skill.... To Erasmus it may seem a beautiful thing...and very useful in promoting religion to treat Holy Writ in a new style, that is, in a more refined and polished manner, but prudent and knowledgeable men have always judged it to be a very rash thing and approaching sin and sacrilege zealously to introduce into pious and humble doctrine the arrogance and blandishment of pagan letters, as if they by themselves led to salvation (Rummel 98).

Whether one could ever find a text in Erasmus that would support Beda's last claim or not, his fear nevertheless reflects the common impression Erasmus's project left in the minds of the theologians.

Nevertheless, if Erasmus's philological approach to the New Testament was a scandal, his substitution of the Greek text for the *Vulgata Latina* went beyond even Valla.

F. Erasmus and the Greek New Testament

1. Conflict with Dorp

Erasmus fully understood the implications of touching the Vulgate. When Erasmus produced his own edition of the Greek N.T. he was certain to dedicate it to Leo X, thus hopefully placing himself beyond the reach of the Inquisition.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ "In his response to Erasmus's dedication of the Greek New Testament, Pope Leo X remarked that it would be useful for students of sacred theology and for the orthodox faith" (Spitz:216). This would not, however, prevent the Council of Trent from placing Erasmus's Greek text on the index of forbidden books. On this see Putnam (1906: Vol.I, 166-67;328-340).

But even before his text emerged, Erasmus's friend, Martin Dorp, protested, representing the sentiments of the University of Louvain (Bentley, 1979:53-79):

But what sort of an operation this is, to correct the Scriptures, and in particular to correct the Latin copies by means of the Greek, requires careful thought.... Now I differ from you on this question of truth and integrity, and claim that these are qualities of the Vulgate edition that we have in common use. For it is not reasonable that the whole Church which has always used this edition and still both approves and uses it should for all these centuries have been wrong. Nor is it probable that all those holy fathers should have been deceived, and all those saintly men who relied on this version when deciding the most difficult questions in general councils, defending and expounding the faith, and publishing canons to which even kings submitted their civil power. And that councils of this kind duly constituted never err, in so far as they deal with the faith, is generally agreed among both theologians and lawyers. (CE, Vol. 3:21)

To Dorp, Erasmus was calling for nothing less than the dissolution of the very foundation of the Roman Church. Furthermore, there was the tacit admission that the Greek Church and her Sacred Text had primacy over Rome and the *Vulgata*:

Had the Greeks any greater concern than the Latins for preserving the Scriptures undamaged, when you think of the blows Christianity has suffered among the Greeks, and how they firmly hold that everything except St. John's Gospel contains some error...while among the Latins the Bride of Christ, the Church, has continued always inviolate (CE, Vol. 3:21)?⁴⁶

As a matter of fact, not only was Erasmus convinced that the Latin was generally corrupt when it differed from the Greek, but he passed the same judgment on Greek codices that had any affinity with the Vulgate (Bentley, 1983:135).⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Dorp went on to pose the question that Richard Simon would ask the Protestants a little later, thus precipitating *their* sacred text crisis, "And how can you be sure you have lighted on correct copies, assuming that in fact you have found several, however readily I may grant that the Greeks may possess some copies which are correct?"

⁴⁷ This was not absolutely the case, however, because occasionally he gave way to the Vulgate reading over the Greek, as he made clear in a letter defending himself to Antonio Pucci: "Although I have made a complete translation of the Greek text, still I do not approve of the Greek text in every

2. *Philosophia Christi* and Erasmus's New Hermeneutic

Erasmus had no intention of necessarily giving credence to the theology of the Greek Church. But he did see himself in the role of a new Jerome, producing a new textual basis for the establishment of the Erasmian academy.⁴⁸ In one stroke he would circumvent the entire medieval Latin exegetical tradition while reviving the *consensus Ecclesiae* of the early fathers by erecting the Greek text as a new standard. The theologians, most of whom knew no Greek, would be effectively marginalized into insignificance.⁴⁹

Erasmus and other humanists within the Erasmian orbit would be free to construct a new hermeneutic, but as the editor and annotator of the first published Greek N.T. Erasmus had a jump on everyone in this direction. Erasmus was quite self-conscious of the role he was assuming, in a letter to Antonio Pucci in 1518:

instance. In fact, in some passages I prefer our Vulgate version, though I regularly indicate where the orthodox Latin Writers agree or disagree with the Greek" (Hillerbrand 1970:129).

⁴⁸ Margaret Mann Phillips has done a fascinating study of Quentin Metsys's 1517 portrait of Erasmus, in which she recreates the occasion of the sitting: "Quentin has asked Erasmus how he would like to be painted. Erasmus has just finished editing St. Jerome, who is usually depicted as engaged on his translation of the Bible; and Erasmus has just finished a translation of the New Testament. It would be natural for him to adopt the same pose, thus beginning a long series of 'writing' portraits" (Phillips 1975:21).

⁴⁹ McConica notes even Erasmus's "emphasis on good Latin was itself an expression of laicism, since it automatically repudiated the specialized theological language of the schools and emphasized clarity of discourse between educated laymen sharing the cultural heritage of the classics" (1968:8).

If it is desirable for us to have the text of Sacred Scripture in the most accurate state possible, my work not only removes the errors from the sacred texts, but will also prevent further corruptions in the future. If it is desirable that the text be *properly understood*, I have disclosed the meaning of more than six hundred passages which were not understood previously even by eminent theologians. They admit it themselves; they cannot deny it. If it is desirable that a knowledge of the sources be added to the disputatious type of theology which has almost too much authority in the schools, *my* work is especially valuable for that purpose. Therefore no intellectual activity is harmed by this work of mine; rather every kind is helped.... In conclusion, either my love for the work completely deceives me, or it is destined to be of no little value for sacred studies...[emphasis mine] (Hillerbrand:129-130).

As Reventlow has recognized, Erasmus's hermeneutic "could virtually ignore the dogmatic views which were put forward in the Catholic Church at that time" (Reventlow, 1985:47). Reventlow distils Erasmus's hermeneutic in these terms:

Various elements belong to this approach: a dualistic view of the world and man as a starting point and therefore a devaluation of the 'flesh', the corporeal, the real world in favour of the invisible. From this there consistently follows a rejection in principle of the visible cult, of 'ceremonies', which at best can be tolerated as aids to a piety which has not yet come of age (Reventlow:47).

Coogan's recent study of Lee's attacks on Erasmus highlights the fact that this impression and its implications were grasped by one of Erasmus's most bothersome critics:

The significance of the dispute [between Lee and Erasmus] as a focal point in the history of humanism and theology has been neglected. In examining this conflict, one discovers that Lee first foretold in detail the full impact on theology of the correction of the Vulgate. Hard upon the fall of this first *domino*, he predicted assaults not only on the sacrosanct authority of the Fathers, on the doctrine of original sin, and on the sacramental system but even on the Nicean and Chalcedonian confessions which define the nature of Christ and that of the Trinity. And Lee foresaw both the schismatic shock marking the greatest ruin of the century--that of the ecumenical authority of the Catholic Church--as well as the threat of the rebirth of Pelagianism and Arianism, revivals that mark the departure of modern Christianity from its Nicean and Chalcedonian heritage (Coogan 1992:13).

Erasmus had already hinted at his "new hermeneutic" in the *Enchiridion*, admonishing that, "a sensible reading of the pagan poets and philosophers is a good preparation for the Christian life" (Dolan, 1964:36). In his *Paraclesis*,

prefacing his first edition of the Greek text he exhorts all men to read the Greek N.T. in order to study the *philosophia Christi*, which he describes as,

located as it is more truly in the disposition of the mind than in syllogisms, life means more than debate, inspiration is preferable to erudition.... The Stoics understood that no one was wise unless he was good.... According to Plato, Socrates teaches in many different ways that a wrong must not be repaid with a wrong.... Epicurus also acknowledges that nothing in man's life can bring delight unless the mind is conscious of no evil.... What shall we say of this, that many notably Socrates, Diogenes and Epictetus have presented a good portion of His [Christ's] teaching.... But Christ both taught and presented the same doctrine so much more fully.... (Olin, 1965: 100-101).

McConica adds to this:

The Christianity of the *Enchiridion* is both un-sacramental and un-theological.... The novelty of the religious view which the *Enchiridion* proclaimed was in its complete acceptance of the layman's given vocation in the world and the tacit deposing of clerical authority. With this went the warm attitude to classical writers and humanism in general, partly as preparation for the intelligent study of Scripture, partly as a separate source of practical moral wisdom. In the blending of these two themes, laicism and humanism, Erasmus captured in his writing and his own person the strongest impulses moving the educated classes of his day (McConica 1968:23).

This is a most satisfying assessment of Erasmus's legacy.

How this struck theologians in Erasmus's day may be fairly stated in Jedin's personal judgement that "There can be no question but that this lay theology is as deficient in clear-cut definitions as is Ficino's Platonic theology"⁵⁰ (Jedin 1957 1:161).

⁵⁰ "Erasmus commanded the allegiance of the best minds of his day for a reason. It was his genius to fuse into a single stream of thought the converging currents of the late fifteenth century: humanistic textual scholarship, Florentine neo-Platonism, Netherlands piety of the *devotio moderna* and the Windesheim reform movement and the manifold discontents of a middle class suddenly aware of its power and its needs" (McConica 1968:14-15).

3. Origen's Influence

Erasmus found an early patristic echo to his own project in Origen (Levi 1974:23-24). And, as would happen to Erasmus himself at the Council of Trent, this Greek father was declared outside the pale of orthodoxy by Jerome and the Synod of Constantinople (553 C.E.).⁵¹ Origen was the quintessential model for Erasmus. Frend acknowledges that "Origen had only refuted Gnosticism by accepting some of the basic tenets of his opponents. His Trinitarian views moreover reflected those of contemporary Platonists" (Frend 1985:80). Erasmus, too, held to a subordinationist Christology.⁵²

Trigg records, "The most important figure in the Renaissance revival of interest in Origen was the great Dutch humanist Erasmus...who valued Origen

⁵¹ A revival of Origen studies was underway by 1486 when Pico published nine hundred theses, many of which were in defense of Origen, in that year (Rabil 52, n.1). On this see, Wind (1954). For Pico's efforts, like Origen before him and Erasmus after him, he, too, was considered a threat to orthodoxy and "was placed on the index, *inter alia*, for defending Origen" (Chadwick 1966:155, n.4).

⁵² In Coogan's words: "...one finds in the *Annotationes* arguments for an Arian-like absolutism and a subordinationist Christology which can defend the exclusion of all relation from the primary unity and can arm antitrinitarian exegetes. Introducing skeptical positions on crucial issues, he casts doubt not only on patristic testimony, creeds, councils, and confessions, but also on the scriptural basis for assigning the name *God* to Christ and to the Holy Spirit. Because the philological nature of his hermeneutics leads to infra-textual meanings, he steadfastly tries to dissolve the dogmatic accretions of the centuries that prejudice and restrict exegesis. And, although he will say that the Church has the last word in disputes, *sola scriptura* becomes, in effect, the focus for inspiring ethics and beliefs.... In sum, in spite of his repeated insistence on his own orthodoxy, Erasmus puts at risk the whole enterprise of systematic theology in order to purchase an evangelical Christocentricity" (Coogan 115-116).

above all other Christian authors" (Trigg 1983:255). As a precedent from patristic antiquity, Erasmus could confidently invoke Origen in his project of reappropriating aspects of Platonist thought as a legitimate legacy of early Christianity. This was a dangerous legacy, however, that antedated the classic orthodoxy of the post-Nicene Church. Well aware of this, this no doubt accounts for why Erasmus did not attempt to edit Origen's works until the very end of his life.⁵³ Henry Chadwick aptly remarked that Erasmus "tended to see in Origen a reflection of his own humanist face" (Chadwick 1966:123).

Erasmus regarded Origen as "the most skillful in theological matters...[who] furnished material for almost all Greek writers" (Rabil:105). On the title page of his first edition of the Greek N.T., Origen's name is found first in the list of fathers consulted. By the 1519 edition Origen is quoted more than any other Church Father, seventy-eight times (Rabil:117). Erasmus writes in a letter, "Among the ancient interpreters of Scripture, Origen the Greek and Tertullian the Latin writer seem especially outstanding" (Rabil:117). He wrote to John Eck that he learned more from one page of Origen than in ten pages of Augustine (Trigg:225)⁵⁴

Erasmus was indebted to Origen for his Christology, the full development of his *philosophia Christi* (Fokke:244-257), and his exegesis (though

⁵³ Peters suggests the same thing: "Were there not other reasons for Erasmus' hesitancy to publish? He knew well the long drawn out controversies concerning Origen's orthodoxy and the present whereabouts of his soul. He knew also of the troubles in which Pico had been landed because of his defense of Origen.... Discretion never quite forsook Erasmus, and his concern for his self-preservation is reflected in his patristic scholarship as elsewhere" (Peters 1967:261).

⁵⁴ For other passages in this vein see Crouzel (1989:267). On Origen's overall influence on Erasmus see Godin (1982).

he did think Origen went too far with his use of allegory), particularly in his debate with Luther regarding the freedom of the will (Crouzel, 1989:239-265; Trigg 255-56). Like Origen, Erasmus had a subordinationist christology which allowed him the freedom to question the orthodox interpretations of many of the major passages traditionally used to defend the deity of Christ (Payne, 1970:54-70).⁵⁵

4. The *Comma Johanneum*

When Erasmus did not add the *comma Johanneum* to the First Epistle of John it opened the way for theologians to accuse him of contributing to a revival of Arianism (Bentley, 1983:202; Coogan: 53-116).⁵⁶ Of course, Erasmus's christology probably had nothing to do with his judgement to omit this passage (although its omission from all the Greek codices he had surveyed probably reinforced his conviction that the Trinity was a late dogmatic reflection of the Church rather than a Biblical teaching). It was simply missing from all the Greek witnesses he consulted, reason enough to drop it. But the churchmen at Alcalá, with probably no more Greek MS evidence for this passage than Erasmus possessed,⁵⁷ added it to their Greek text from the Vulgate, because it had gained,

⁵⁵ On Origen's Christology see Rowe (1987).

⁵⁶ For a detailed treatment of all those who criticized Erasmus's text and annotations see Bludau (1902:425-569). For briefer treatments see Boyle (1986:123-171), Bentley (1983:194-219) and Rabil (94, n.158). For a definitive treatment of the data surrounding Erasmus and the *comma Johanneum*, see de Jonge (1980:381-89).

⁵⁷ On this point see Tregelles's excellent treatment (1869:358-361).

from around the year 800 CE onward, canonical status as part of the sacred text of the Latin Bible.

Erasmus was, however, certain it was a corruption, added to the text by the Western Church, a witness to him of yet one more form of dogmatic corruption influencing the Latin Bible. Luther seems to have been in rare agreement with Erasmus on this point. In Luther's commentary on John's first epistle he observes from Erasmus's *Annotationes*:

The Greek books do not have these words, but this verse seems to have been inserted by the Catholics because of the Arians, yet not aptly; for wherever John speaks about the witnesses, he speaks about those on earth, not about those in heaven (LW Vol. 30:316).

Luther never put the verse in his Bible even after Erasmus added it to his third edition of the Greek New Testament.⁵⁸

The *comma Johanneum* takes on great significance from this time forward in the history of text criticism because it remains as proof positive to future Erasmians that the Church has expanded the New Testament message at places to accommodate emerging dogmatic concerns.

⁵⁸ It was added after Luther's death. There have been attempts to prove that Luther reconsidered and had come to see it as genuine in later lectures on the epistle but this seems to have been answered by Ezra Abbott (1888:458-463). In his own words, Luther addressed possible future revisions of his text: "I request my friends and my foes, my masters, printers, and readers, to let this New Testament continue mine. If they find faults in it, let them make another. I know well what I make, I see also well, what others make. But this testament shall remain Luther's German Testament" (Michaelis, 1823:439). Nevertheless, contrary to his wishes, the verse was first added in the Frankfurt edition of 1574. (ibid.) On the other hand, like the churchmen at Alcalá, John Calvin and Theodore Beza both treated it as genuine. Even the French humanist, Lefèvre, defended it against Erasmus (Rice 1969:180), based on the erroneous assumption of the authenticity of Jerome's prologue to the catholic epistles, which did not begin to appear until the ninth century, cf. Scrivener (1894:vol 2, 404, n. 2).

5. Translation Controversies and Errors in the Sacred Text

Erasmus's translation of the Greek λόγος as *sermo* rather than *verbum*, as Jerome had translated it, led to another storm of criticism. Acting the role of a *new* Jerome, he risked the accusations that he was changing a text that had been read in the entire Western Church for a thousand years; and that he was, in fact, correcting the Gospel of John itself! (for so it was perceived by the unlearned clergy). He did so, as Boyle suggests, because "*sermo* is not in his judgement a doctrinal issue, but a grammatical one. It is the province of translators, not of bishops" (Boyle, 1977:12).⁵⁹ The sacred text of Scripture was slipping from the grasp of the theologians and the Church, into the hands of the philological technicians and the province of the academy.

However, not even the Greek text really functioned for Erasmus as a new sacred text, as it would for the Protestants, but merely as a religious text from which he could fashion his Platonic-like, moral imperative.⁶⁰ On occasions the

⁵⁹ Erasmus probably preferred *sermo*, because as Jarrott suggested, it means a discourse between persons "one of the most popular forms of literary activity in the dialogue-conscious Renaissance" (Jarrott, 1964:35). There was, however, an antecedent to this with christological significance. Marsilio Ficino of the Florentine Academy had also translated the Greek as *sermo* rather than *verbum* "thereby sloughing off the whole traditional conception of Christ as the Eternal Word (Logos, Verbum) in a philosophical sense as the Mind and Instrument of God, and substituting the idea of Christ as merely the voice of God" (Williams 1962:25).

⁶⁰ When the controversy over Reuchlin flared up Erasmus commented: "I would prefer the New Testament to be left untouched and that the whole of the Old Testament should be destroyed rather than that peace should be shattered among Christians because of Jewish books" (Reventlow 1985:47). No doubt this is what Jedin has in mind when he says Erasmus's "Philosophy of Christ" glided all too lightly over the depths of the Christian mysteries" (Jedin 1957 1:161).

theologians caught him in a vulnerable position. From his teaching post at the University of Ingolstadt Johann Eck asked Erasmus in a friendly letter, why at Matt. 2:6 Erasmus had said of the inspired author of Matthew's Gospel, that he "trusted as men will to memory and had made a mistake." (In the N.T. Bethlehem is referred to as "not the least," in the O.T. "as the least.") (Benson, 1985:158). Eck admonishes the humanist,

Listen, dear Erasmus: do you suppose any Christian will patiently endure to be told that the evangelists in their Gospels made mistakes? If the authority of Holy Scripture at this point is shaky, can any other passage be free from the suspicion of error (Benson:158)?

Erasmus's response is to point out that he was but offering an opinion held by others as a possible solution to the problem. But then goes on to reveal his true conviction,

Nor, in my view, would the authority of the whole of Scripture be instantly imperilled, as you suggest, if an evangelist by a slip of the memory did put one name for another, Isaiah for instance instead of Jeremiah, for this is not a point on which anything turns (Benson:159).⁶¹

Even Peter had lapses, so Erasmus argued, as Augustine and Ambrose acknowledged.⁶²

Erasmus, with Valla's help, had provided all the raw ingredients for dislodging confidence in the Latin Vulgate and in turn scholastic theology which was based upon it. Huizinga maintained that through his publications during

⁶¹ It is fair to say that the Reformers probably shared this view with Erasmus concerning various minor discrepancies in the texts of Scripture Cf. Bainton (CHB, Vol3:12-13). Bainton points out that while they held to a verbal view of inspiration this did not entail inerrancy as it would later, especially in the nineteenth century, though the seventeenth-century dogmatists make various attempts at harmonization. On the Lutheran dogmatists see Preus (1957) and on the Reformed see Muller (1987; 1993).

⁶² I find it difficult to reconcile this with Spitz's judgement, "Erasmus held that all of the canonical Scriptures were free from errors, for they were produced by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit himself..." (Spitz:216).

the years 1514-1516, Erasmus became "the center of the scientific study of divinity, as he was at the same time the center and touchstone of classic erudition and literary taste" (Tracy:131).⁶³ He did everything in his power to suggest an alternative philosophical agenda. In spite of all of his critics this one man's accomplishments in this direction were nothing short of formidable. They would have even carried the day, but for Luther.

G. Luther and the Erasmian Project

Luther, yet another from the priest-class, had his own, new Biblical agenda. When Erasmus attempted to distance himself from this theologian by attacking his "determinism," resorting to his favourite theologian, Origen, Luther sensed the vulnerability of Erasmus's hermeneutic and held Origen up to scorn:

You see, therefore, that the controversy here is not about the text itself, nor is it any longer about inferences and similes, but about tropes and interpretations. When, then, are we ever going to have a text pure and simple, [*sola Scriptura*] without tropes and inferences.... Look what happened to that master of tropes, Origen, in his exposition of the Scriptures! What fitting objects of attack he provides for the calumnies of Porphyry, so that even Jerome thinks that the defenders of Origen have an impossible task (LCC, Vol. 17:220-221).

Because Erasmus had "picked on the essence of Luther's position, the denial of any autonomous power of self-determination in man" (Levi:29),⁶⁴ Luther gave vent to his suspicion of what might lie at the bottom of Erasmus's

⁶³ I am indebted to Tracy for this quotation.

⁶⁴ Always interpreted by Erasmus as the results of common grace. On this see Boyle (1984:59-77).

mishandling of sacred Scripture: a hidden atheism.⁶⁵ Luther became livid over Erasmus's scepticism regarding the perspicuity of Scripture on this issue of the power of the will:

By such tactics you only succeed in showing that you foster in your heart a Lucian, or some other pig from Epicurus' sty who, having no belief in God himself, secretly ridicules all who have a belief and confess it. Permit us to be assertors, to be devoted to assertions and delight in them, while you stick to your Sceptics and Academics till Christ calls you too. The Holy Spirit is no Sceptic... (LCC:109)⁶⁶

In a letter to Wenceslas Link, Luther is even more blunt asserting that "Christ will judge this atheist and Epicurean Lucian" (LW, Vol. 49:216).⁶⁷

Erasmus responded to Luther at one point by saying, "I, Epicurus, if I had survived to the time of the apostles and had heard them preaching the gospel so scurrilously, I am afraid I should have remained Epicurus" (Boyle, 1981:92).

⁶⁵On the use of the word "atheist" in the sixteenth century see Febvre (131-146).

⁶⁶For a good analysis of Erasmus's use of skepticism in this debate see Popkin (1960:1-16) and Boyle (1983).

⁶⁷Erasmus had in fact said in his colloquy, *Epicureus* (1535) "There are no people more Epicurean than godly Christians...and no one better deserves the name of Epicurean than the revered founder and head of Christian philosophy" (Boyle, 1981:68). Luther saw Erasmus, as with nearly everything else, in apocalyptic terms. In his commentary on Genesis he used the word *Epicurean* with totally different connotations, asserting, "ungodliness and smugness follow when the Word of God is despised and is not made use of. People become atheists, Epicureans, and bereft of reason" (LW, vol. 4:391). In 1543 in a letter to Wenceslas Link he followed up on this theme, "Now is the time which was predicted to come after the fall of Antichrist, when people will be Epicureans and atheists, so that the word of Christ might be fulfilled" (LW, Vol. 50:243).

H. The Protestants and the New Sacred Text

Erasmus's wish that the new-born babe of the Greek N.T. might be wrapped in the swaddling clothes of ancient pagan wisdom, as distilled in his *philosophia Christi*, was foiled by Luther.⁶⁸ The German snatched her up and wrapped her in the vestments of a new order of theological dogma: the Greek N.T became the new sacred text for the new Protestant Church. The Greek-and-Hebrew-reading Protestant clergy became the new privileged interpreter class (the so-called "priesthood of all believers" notwithstanding).⁶⁹

Many of the humanist stars formerly shining in the heaven of Erasmus's new academy began to fall into the gravitational pull of Wittenberg, such as Melancthon, Calvin, Bucer, and to a lesser extent, Zwingli, et al.

Nietzsche, looking back at this critical juncture toward the end of his life, bemoaned Erasmus's failed project with great despair because he felt that had it

⁶⁸ Both Erasmus and Luther were perhaps equally responsible for initiating the modern quest for the *essence of Christianity* which would so preoccupy nineteenth-century historians and theologians (*cf.* Bainton 1988:226). Erasmus's *philosophia Christi* gave expression to the non-dogmatic option, providing guidance from the ancient classical traditions for the dawning of what he thought would be a new golden age. Luther, on the other hand, was concerned with *iustificatio peccatoris* as his guiding principle which could even marginalize aspects of the received biblical canon in his quest to continue answering questions raised by medievalism. For a treatment of the *essence* issue in the history of Christian thought, see Sykes's chapter, "Analysis of the Essence Discussion," in *The Identity of Christianity* (1984:211-238). While Sykes's rightly sees that "The creation of priorities, in Luther's case, operated as a critical hermeneutic of received traditions" (225), he has altogether neglected Erasmus's contribution to this development.

⁶⁹ John Owen records in his classic *The Skeptics of the Italian Renaissance*: "In one sense Protestantism is the offspring of Romanism; and it would have been curious if she had not manifested some of the lineaments of her parent" (Owen 1908:417).

been successful, it would have brought the West much closer to his own goal, the eventual dissolution of the Christian tradition:

Is it at last understood, is there a *desire* to understand, *what* the Renaissance was? The *revaluation of Christian values*, the attempt, undertaken with every expedient, with every instinct, with genius of every kind, to bring about the victory of the opposing values, the *noble* values.... What happened? A German monk, Luther, went to Rome. This monk, all the vindictive instincts of a failed priest in him, fulminated in Rome *against* the Renaissance.... And Luther *restored the Church* (Nietzsche, 1895:184-85).⁷⁰

As for the Roman Church, Erasmus was also defeated by the great council that met at Trent (1546) declaring the Vulgate, in spite of Valla and Erasmus, the only authoritative text of Scripture. Like his guide, Origen, Erasmus, too, would become tagged unorthodox and placed on the Index of forbidden books by the council. Because of his particular threat to the Church the Jesuits came to regard him as "a pestilence greater than Luther or Calvin" (Mansfield 1979:119).

I. SUMMARY

Perhaps another look at the circumstances of Erasmus's birth and its influence on Erasmus will help us to better understand why he was so passionate in offering what he saw as a sound alternative to Roman Catholic intellectual and spiritual life in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. From his earliest years he must have felt a keen alienation from the Church which was no doubt reinforced by his early exposure to the *Devotio Moderna*.

⁷⁰ Nietzsche no doubt had in mind the Southern brand of humanism more directly than Erasmus's mediating position. Nevertheless, Luther overshadowed both branches of humanism, reasserting a *reformed* catholicism. On the paganism of the Roman humanism see D'Amico (1983). On the general scepticism of the Southern Renaissance see Owen (1908).

His desire to discover a community, a new academy, exemplifying his *philosophia Christi* was never realized in his lifetime. His time spent in Thomas More's home was perhaps the closest he ever came to his idealized society of kindred spirits. He described this experience in the following terms:

You might say that he [More] had in his house another academy of Plato if I did not insult him by the comparison; for in that academy they used to dispute concerning numbers and figures, sometimes concerning virtue and morality. You might more properly call this house the school and gymnasium of the Christian religion. Though all the members of the family make piety the principal object of their concern, yet they find time for liberal studies and for profitable reading. In that house the voice of contention is never heard, no one is ever seen idle. Every one does his duty with alacrity, and not without a temperate cheerfulness. That distinguished man secures the good order of his household not by overbearing and harsh treatment, but by gentleness and kindness. All are diligent in the discharge of their duties, and exhibit, while engaged in them, a spirit of sobriety and cheerfulness (Pennington 1875:355).

By contrast, Erasmus came to see most theologians and the theological enterprise as dangerous and death-dealing. He would never be caught in their web. His motto, as it appeared on his personal device, was *concedo nulli* (McConica 1968:13-14). In 1521 he writes, "Not all have strength enough for martyrdom. I fear that I shall, in case it results in a tumult, follow St. Peter's example" (Huizinga, 1957:159). When his close friend and colleague, Thomas More, was executed, Erasmus exclaimed, "Would More had never meddled with that dangerous business, and left the theological cause to the theologians" (Huizinga:183). Likewise, Luther's theological passion was never fully understood by him, as is clear from such comments as, "Luther seems to me to behave as though he did not wish to be kept alive" (CE 1988:212).

Erasmus, of course, wished to be kept alive. In fact, his maxim was "Not Martyrs but Doctors" (Jedin 1957 1:157, n.1). By quietly spending his life doing the work of a philologist,⁷¹ the implications of what he accomplished were

⁷¹ Jedin has captured the essence of Erasmus: "By instinct a scholar and philologist, his one interest was culture, and culture for him was the culture of

not fully realized by the corporate Church until Trent, long after he had passed.⁷² It is almost impossible, from our "post-modern" standpoint to appreciate the radicalism of Erasmus's project. Rummel brings into focus this aspect of Erasmus's lasting legacy:

His references to discrepancies in the accounts of the apostles, his attention to the grammatical and stylistic flaws in their writings, and his criticism of the translator of the Vulgate ('whoever he was') aroused the ire of conservative theologians, who saw the authority of the Bible endangered by such remarks (Rummel 1986:184).

Erasmus both disrupted confidence in the Vulgate as a sacred text and in so doing also negated the hermeneutical tradition that had enveloped it from the Middle Ages. In its place he submitted the Greek text of the Eastern (heterodox)

antiquity, crowned and perfected by Christianity" (Jedin 1957 I:157). Breen has called our attention to the two types of humanists in the sixteenth century: "Civic humanists were the Moderns; those who did not participate in civil life but remained aloof in their ivory towers were the Classicists.... Some of the greatest humanists were Classicists rather than Moderns: Petrarch, Valla, Erasmus, whose accomplishments argue sufficiently that the Classicists were not to be scorned" (Breen 1968:168, n.83). In France, Basil Hall discerned three groups. The first he calls the court humanists which he divided into two groups--those under the patronage of Francis, who had established the Royal Library at Fontainebleau and the *Lecteurs Royaux* at Paris; and those under the patronage of Marguerite of Navarre. Some of these latter humanists, influenced by Platonizing mysticism, eventually became advocates of reform, like Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples. A final group he tags the philologists, followers of Erasmus (Hall, 1956:7). In the long run, it would be this latter group who would prove to be the most menacing to the Church in the progress toward modernity.

⁷² Except by those critics, such as Lee, who seemed to sense the direction Erasmianism would go. Although, his *Colloquia* was condemned by the Sorbonne in 1526 as were thirty-two propositions from his paraphrases the next year (McConica 1968:33, n.2).

Church,⁷³ and his *philosophia Christi* as the new hermeneutic. as Basil Hall says, this hermeneutic was "without reference to the dogmatic definitions of scholasticism" (Hall 1970:81), and it was from these ingredients that Erasmus hoped to see a new *academy* emerge, what van Gelder called the *Major Reformation*, in contrast to Luther's minor Reformation (Van Gelder 1961),⁷⁴ and what Margo Todd called "Utopia" (Todd 1987:260).

All of this activity was accomplished without the invitation of the Church, by someone who may have never finished his first theological degree.⁷⁵ The Roman Church rejected both his text and his hermeneutic; the Protestants accepted his text, giving it sacred text status, but also rejected his hermeneutic.

The debate that surrounded his rejection of the *comma Johanneum* (as well as the entire dynamic of the conflict between the Church's claim over the province of the Bible as a *sacred text* versus Erasmus's claims over it as a philologist) set the tone for every such exchange that would take place in the future. From the sixteenth century to the present, the Church has been perennially concerned to conserve the exact configuration of her sacred text, in order to preserve her dogmatic legacy which is grounded upon it. The Biblical

⁷³ "The Greek original was regarded as the biased authority of schismatical, if not heterodox, Greeks: to use their Greek original was to favour their dangerous opinions" (Hall 1970:85).

⁷⁴ Later, Edward Gibbon would refer to Erasmus's as "the secret reformation" (I will refer to this in a later chapter).

⁷⁵ Although J.K. Sowards is persuaded that "The presumptive evidence for his baccalaureat degree is too strong." Others, however, point out that his illegitimacy probably forbade his receiving a degree because of a faculty statute prohibiting this, if indeed he finished his course at all, of which there is no hard evidence (Sowards 1989:29-30).

philologist wittingly or unwittingly is forever "on a quest for the historical Jesus." Erasmus opened the wound; others would pour in the salt.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Augustine fled to the comforting bosom of the Church thus escaping his prior identity as a dissolute, academic itinerant. This earlier life had resulted in the birth of his illegitimate son. Erasmus, on the other hand, fled from the dogma and structure of the institutional Church whose medieval prohibition against marriage for clerics probably contributed to his own illegitimacy. Erasmus, in turn, became an itinerant scholar who found comfort in the rhetorical categories and moral teaching of classical antiquity. Here he found the liberating possibilities of a self-affirming, self-preserving identity, even if his advocacy of the same resulted in the eventual dissolution of aspects of the medieval Latin Church. Augustine, in fleeing this tradition, laid the foundation for medievalism. Erasmus, in returning to it, paved the way for modernity.

CHAPTER TWO

Die Ausgänge des Dogmas im römischen Katholicismus. The Tridentine Response to Erasmianism: The *Vulgata Latina* as Sacred Text

Now to give thee also intelligence in particular, most gentle reader, of such thinges as it behoueth thee specially to know concerning our Translation: We translate the old vulgar Latin text, not the common Greeke text, for these causes.... It is not only better than al other Latin translations, but then the Greeke text itself, in those places where they disagree.

--Preface to the *Rhemes New Testament*, 1582

A. The *Vulgata Latina*: Verbal Icon of the Western Church

One feature that makes a text sacred is how it is communicated into human language. The Decalogue was produced by the very finger of God; the Septuagint was produced miraculously by seventy-two Jewish Elders, in seventy days; the Holy Qur'an was revealed from heaven, a portion at a time, directly to the prophet Mohammed by the angel Gabriel.

While not sharing such an explicitly miraculous origin, the *Vulgata Latina* was, nevertheless, produced, or thought to have been produced, by one of the most important saints of the Western Church--Saint Jerome.¹ The common theme intended to be asserted in each of these accounts was the quality of verbally dictated, or communicated inspiration.

¹For an argument that Jerome may well have produced the entire N.T. of the Vulgata, see Albert A. Bell, Jr., 'Jerome's role in the Translation of the Vulgate New Testament', *New Testament Studies*, 33 (1977: 230-33).

Jerome's Bible soon replaced the *Vetus Latina* as the official Bible of the Latin Church. The magnificent monastic tradition of manuscript illumination, produced first by the Hiberno-Saxon school and then followed by the monks of the Carolingian and Anglo-Saxon religious communities, bears witness to the sacred text status of the *Vulgata* in the early middle ages.

These were never meant to be mere ornamentations or decoration. Instead, they were, "an integral part of the metamorphosis from reality to image, to symbol, to elementary form."² These symbols were intended to designate these texts, like the holy icons themselves, as sacred windows to the transcendent.

To adorn the manuscripts of the *Vulgata* the Carolingian school eventually produced iconographic representations of the holy evangelists composing their Gospels by the dictation of the Holy Spirit. In clear imitation of the classical Byzantine style of the Eastern Church, with some modification, the evangelists' portraits are found more often in these manuscripts than any other in early medieval art.

These portraits of the evangelists were again a means of pictorially communicating the idea of the verbally dictated inspiration of the sacred text. The means for showing this were usually a dove hovering around their head, symbolizing the Holy Spirit; or two fingers pointing down from heaven, representing Divine impartation; or at times an angel is shown providing the inspired content. In this way, the icon of the evangelist helped to convey the idea of the unique sacredness of the divinely inspired text.

²Hans Holländer, *The Herbert History of Art and Architecture: Early Medieval* (1990: 23). On this further consult O.K. Werckmeister, *Irish-northumbrische Buchmalerei des. 8. Jahrhunderts und monastische Spiritualität* (1967).

It was the Eastern Father, however, St. John of Damascus (c.675-c.749), who placed together as objects of veneration (προσκύνησις--literally bowing down to), the holy books, relics and icons, arguing that a "relative worship" was due to "objects dedicated to God, such as the holy Gospels and other books, for they have been written for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come."³

For St. John Damascene, not only was Holy Scripture put in the same category with the sacred icons as an object worthy of veneration, the text itself was seen as a *verbal* icon which functioned in the same way as a *pictorial* icon.

Again, visible things are corporeal models which provide a vague understanding of intangible things. Holy Scripture describes God and the angels as having descriptive form.... Anyone would say that our inability immediately to direct our thoughts to contemplation of higher things makes it necessary that familiar everyday media be utilized to give suitable form to what is formless, and make visible what cannot be depicted, so that we are able to construct understandable analogies. If, therefore, the Word of God, in providing for our every need, always presents to us what is intangible by clothing it with form, does it not accomplish this by making an image using what is common to nature and so brings within our reach that for which we long but are unable to see?⁴

With this understanding of the Bible as, indeed, a verbal icon, it is easy to understand how part of the veneration of Scripture would include retaining a fixed form of the Scripture text, just as innovation in the reproduction of icons was taboo.

³St. John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images: Three Apologies Against Those Who Attack the Divine Images* (1980:10; 86). For an excellent introduction to St. John of Damascus's teaching on Icons consult, George D. Dragas, "St. John Damascene's Teaching about Holy Icons," in *Icons Windows on Eternity: Theology and Spirituality in Color* (1990: 53-72).

⁴St. John of Damascus (20).

Furthermore, this iconographic reverence for the Scripture took on a further tangible expression in the liturgy. The four Gospels particularly were the most elaborately produced manuscripts:

Unquestionably the most sumptuous manuscripts of any part of the Scriptures produced in the middle ages...the copies of the four Gospels bound in one volume, frequently with splendid covers of ivory and metal work. The Gospels were regarded with particular veneration by the faithful, and an eight-century writer compares the entry of the gospel book of Mass to the entry of Christ himself (Wormald CHB 2:326).

Furthermore,

High esteem for the word of Christ is seen not only in the care and wealth expended on the writing, decorating and binding of the Gospel book, which began with the Celtic and Anglo-Saxon civilizations, but also in the fact that, with the sacramentary or the missal, it was allowed to rest on the altar.... Gradually the carrying of the gospel book to the *ambo* developed into a formal procession.... To the procession were added, at times, a cross bearer and a cleric carrying a cushion upon which the book was placed during the reading.... After the Gospel, the book was handed round by the subdeacon to the attendant clergy for veneration by a kiss (van Dijk CHB2:229-230).

For nearly a thousand years it was the *Vulgata Latina* that fulfilled this role of a *verbal* icon in the Western Church.

With the advent of the mechanistic printing press in the fifteenth century, one also sees the beginning of the end of Biblical manuscript illumination.⁵

⁵On the impact of the printed book on the west, see the standard work, Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *The Coming of the Book: the Impact of Printing 1450-1800* trans. by David Gerard (London, 1990 [first published French edition, 1958]). It is true that after the twelfth century and into the thirteenth, what Marcel Thomas called the beginning of the Secular Age of manuscript production, with the founding of universities and the introduction of paper, the greater demand for books produced a secular trade of bookmakers and even illuminators. This does not negate the fact that for religious ecclesiastical use, "Monasteries in the Secular Period continued to copy manuscripts they needed for their own use, just as they had done in the 'monastic' period. The rules of the monastic orders prescribed a certain number of hours each day for intellectual work, and copying was an important part of this. Organised on traditional lines, the scriptoria produced works of learning and service books, and went on doing so until printing finally relegated the manuscript to the past-and indeed beyond, for, as much from tradition as

Stripped of its sacred dress of illumination and now produced by a secular book trade, the Bible now begins to resemble any other text, all of which are uniformly squeezed out from the same printer's mould, not primarily for the edification of men's souls as for their new found purchasing power.⁶

Moreover, the sacred text is now also subject to the necessary but mundane practice of manuscript collations for the purpose of constructing a definitive *printed* edition. Because of the close scrutiny to which the manuscripts were now subject, humanists like Lorenzo Valla and Desiderius Erasmus began to discover through their collations of Greek exemplars that the *Vulgata Latina* had many textual flaws, some of which brought into question certain dogmas. It is my belief that these two developments, the loss of monastic piety expressed in Biblical illumination and the advent of printing, signal the beginning of the desacralization of the Bible in general in the west, and of the *Vulgata Latina* in particular.

B. Trent

Erasmus's project of replacing the sacred text of the Western Church with the Greek text of what was considered to be the schismatic Eastern Church, was seen by many Roman Catholic theologians to be the most troublesome feature

necessity, monasteries still continued to copy missals, antiphonaries and breviaries until well into the 16th century," Marcel Thomas, "Manuscripts," in *The Coming of the Book*, (18-19). Moreover, certain monasteries continued, even into the secular period, to be in demand for their calligraphy or illumination, as this provided a source of income (19).

⁶"One fact must not be lost sight of: the printer and the bookseller worked above all and from the beginning for profit" (Febvre and Martin: 249).

of the dual threat of humanism and Protestantism.⁷ This is highlighted by the fact that Erasmus's edition of the Greek text was placed on the index of forbidden books, even though it had the earlier approval of Pope Leo X.⁸

It was not until the fourth session of the Council of Trent, held on 8 April 1546, that the Latin Church gave her official judgement on the Erasmian project. The Synod declared that the

vetus et vulgata editio, quae longo tot saeculorum usu in ipsa ecclesia probata est, in publicis lectionibus, disputationibus, praedicationibus et expositionibus pro authentica habeatur; et ut nemo illam rejicere quovis praetextu audeat vel praesumat.⁹

⁷M.A. Screech has rightfully emphasised that Erasmus's first published Latin edition, accompanying his Greek recension (1516), was intended to be a correction of the Vulgata rather than a new translation from the Greek. He is convinced that 'The Greek original came fully into its own when all other authorities failed,' Anne Reeve, ed., *Erasmus' Annotations on the New Testament* (1986:xvii). Nevertheless, when one surveys the arguments of Erasmus's many Catholic critics (Dorp, Lee, Stunica, et al.), it is always his use of the Greek N.T. as a superior authority over the Vulgata that is the cause of their disapprobation. On this see Erika Rummel, *Erasmus and His Catholic Critics* 2 vols. (1989). Cf. also A. Bludau, *Die beiden ersten Erasmus-Ausgaben des Neuen Testament* (1902); Jerry H. Bentley (1979:51-79) (1983:194-213); and of course Coogan (1992) mentioned in the previous chapter.

⁸On this see G.H. Putnam, *The Censorship of the Church of Rome* 2 vols (1906:328-40). In the Index of Paul IV (1559) Erasmus's blanket condemnation was greater than that of either Luther or Calvin.

⁹Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of the Greek and Latin Churches* (1877:82), that the "ancient vulgate translation which is recommended by the long use of so many centuries in the Church, be regarded as authoritative in public lectures, disputations, sermons and expository discourses, and that no one may make bold or presume to reject it on any pretext."

But just what did the Council mean when it said the old Latin edition must be regarded as *authentica*?¹⁰

In a papal encyclical by Pope Pius XII, titled *Divino afflante spiritu*, and published in September of 1943, it was explained that the decree first of all "concerns only the Latin Church and her public use of Scripture." But had not the *Professio Fidei Tridentinae*, prepared by the order of Pius IV in 1564, required all those who would be saved to profess "the holy Catholic Apostolic Roman Church as the mother and mistress of all churches"?¹¹ The twentieth century encyclical went on to assert, "This pre-eminent authority, or 'authenticity,' of the Vulgate was determined by the Council not primarily on critical grounds." Rather, it is approved only because "it may safely and without danger of error be cited in discussions, lectures, and sermons." Not only does this appear to be a minimizing of the language of Trent, we are further informed that we are, indeed, now "almost required" to depart from the *Vulgata* for reasons of "corroborating" doctrine "by means of the original texts."¹² In this, one senses a demythologizing of the language of Trent.¹³

¹⁰I do not find Edmund F. Sutcliffe's, S.J. argument very compelling that the Council's decree had no dogmatic intent on this subject. Moreover, he uses a twentieth-century papal encyclical to define *authentica*. See his "The Council of Trent on the *Authentica* of the Vulgate," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 49 (1948:35-42).

¹¹Philip Schaff, *A History of the Creeds of Christendom* (1877:96-9).

¹²Pius XII, Encyclical Letter, *Divino afflante spiritu* (1945:17-18).

¹³On literature treating the interpretation of Trent on this point since the promulgation of *Divino afflante spiritu*, see H. Jedin, *Papal Legate at the Council of Trent* trans. by F.C. Eckhoff (1947:283-300); R. Draguet, 'Le maître louvaniste Driedo inspirateur du décret de Trent sur la Vulgate,' in *Miscellanea historica in honorem Alberi De Meyer* (1946: 836-54); B. Emmi, 'Il Decreto Tridentino sulla Volgata nei commenti della prima polemica protestanti

May I suggest that the way to discover the authorial intent of the Tridentine decree is to examine it not in light of the developments of modernity, but rather, in light of the *medieval* view of the *Vulgata*? By employing the categories of the *Vulgata* as a sacred text, as the verbal icon of the Western Church, we may hope to arrive at a more reasonable interpretation of Trent as well as a more illuminating understanding of the significance and role of the Latin Bible in the sixteenth century.

On 1 April, 1575, nearly thirty-five years after the Council was concluded, Robert Bellarmine put to Cardinal Sirleto, a *scriptor* of the Vatican Library, the following question:

I come now to some questions which are occupying my own mind. The first and chief of them is, what did the Council of Trent intend when in its fourth session it decreed that the Latin Vulgate was to be held authentic? For I find that there is the greatest divergence of view on this important matter among men of the highest eminence. Some openly affirm that our Latin Vulgate edition has been so approved by the Council that it is not now permissible, on any account, to say that there is a single sentence in this edition which is false or which does not convey the mind of the original writer. These men would prefer to slight the authority of the Hebrew and Greek codices rather than admit any lapse in the Vulgate text, and they teach that we possess the true and genuine sense of the Scriptures in this edition, just as much as if we had the sacred autographs of the original writers in our hands. Other authorities, on the contrary, hold that nothing of the kind was ever decreed by the Council. According to them, all that it decreed was that this ancient Vulgate edition was to be retained in the Church, as being the best, and that no other was to be used in scholastic lectures, in sermons, or in the liturgy. Yet though nothing whatever is to be found in this edition contrary to faith or morals, it cannot be denied that its Latin translator

cocattolica,' *Angelicum* 30 (1953: 107-30; 228-272); J. Levie, S.J., *The Bible, Word of God in Words of Men* (1961:133-55). Cf. also an earlier work treating this subject before 1943, H. Rongy, 'La Vulgate et le concile de Trente,' *Revue ecclésiastique de Liège* 19 (1927-28:19-31).

sometimes nods like the rest of men,¹⁴ and more than once has missed the true sense of the Scripture....¹⁵

Bellarmino never received a satisfying answer to his question.

Almost a year later, however, the sacred Congregation of the Council published their ruling on the definitive interpretation of the Tridentine decree. They,

declared that in order to incur the penalties laid down in the decree of the Tridentine Fathers it was sufficient to change a sentence, a clause, a phrase, a word, a syllable, an iota even, contrary to the text of the Vulgate (Brodrick 298-9).

While this would seem to be consonant with the actual language of the decree, Bellarmine never accepted it. Instead, he conducted his own research on the subject resulting in his posthumous work, *De editione Latina vulgata, quo sensu a Concilio Tridentino definitum sit, ut pro authentica habeatur*.¹⁶ After citing many authors, some of whom had been present at the council, he concluded, in opposition to the sacred Congregation of the Council,

All the writers whom I have had a opportunity of consulting up to the present, seem to arrive at the following conclusion: the Vulgate must be considered as free from error on all questions of Catholic faith and morality and it alone must be used in public worship and lectures in schools, *even though in other respects it may have its faults* [emphasis mine] (Brodrick: 299).

How could Bellarmine come away with a different interpretation from that of the sacred Congregation?

Bellarmino had discovered and accurately described, in both his question to Cardinal Sirleto and in his own interpretation of the decree, that there had

¹⁴A phrase also used by Erasmus in reference to the *Vulgata*.

¹⁵J. Brodrick, S.J. *The life and Work of Blessed Robert Francis Cardinal Bellarmine, S.J. 1542-1621* 2 vols (1928 1: 298).

¹⁶This was written sometime between 1586-1591 but was not discovered until after Bellarmine's death and was then published in 1749, (Brodrick:299).

been two approaches to this question and that they were hotly debated at the Council. We know this because of the account given to us of the debates by Paolo Sarpi.

Sarpi was the Italian monk and canonist responsible for the brief that defeated Pope Paul V's interdict against Venice in 1606.¹⁷ It is he who provides us with the earliest account of the debates behind the decrees in his *History of the Council of Trent* (published not in Italy, but in London and in English in 1620).¹⁸ On the subject of the *Vulgata* Sarpi identifies two opposing groups at Trent:

¹⁷On this see, F.A. Yates, 'Paolo Sarpi's "History of the Council of Trent,"' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 7 (1944: 123-143).

¹⁸On the life and work of Sarpi, see A.G. Campbell, *The Life of Fra Paolo Sarpi* (1869); A. Robertson, *Fra Paolo Sarpi the Greatest of the Venetians* (1894); J.L. Lievsay, *Venetian Phoenix: Paolo Sarpi and Some of his English Friends 1606-1700* (1973); David Wootton, *Paolo Sarpi: Between Renaissance and Enlightenment* (1983). Sarpi's *History* was published in England and sponsored by James I. The Italian edition was also published first in London (1619), one year earlier than the English edition. On the sources of Sarpi's history see Campbell (205-09) Robertson (144-46) Yates (133) Wootton (104-17) and Leopold Ranke, *The Popes of Rome* 4th ed. 3 vols trans. by Sarah Austin (1866 3:209-27). Sarpi's was the first history of the council and was translated into most major European languages, seeing several editions in English. Samuel Johnson almost gave it new life, proposing a new translation, but never completed the project. Jedin's work, the modern and definitive Roman Catholic history of the Council based on all available Vatican archival material, offers more detail on this point but is not in essential conflict with Sarpi's account, cf. Jedin, *A History of the Council of Trent* trans. by D. E. Graf 2 vols. (1957-61 2:83-98). Furthermore, Wootton mentions, 'reassessed in light of the evidence available to him, Sarpi's account appears surprisingly exact and careful, and to be based indeed, as he had claimed, on careful research in the original documents.... it does seem to me reasonable to hold that Sarpi's...is essentially an honest work' (Wootton 105).

There was much difference about the Latin Translation of the Scripture, between some few who had good knowledge of the Latin, and some taste of the Greek, and others who were ignorant in the tongues.¹⁹

One of these two groups, those who had some facility with Greek and had undoubtedly been influenced to some degree by aspects of Erasmianism, cited Cajetan as a model churchman on this issue. Cajetan had spent the last eleven years of his life, dealing with the original language texts of Scripture so as to defeat the Protestants on their own terms. This group argued, on the strength of Cajetan's opinion, that only a Latin edition, corrected to the original Hebrew and Greek, could be called authentic and have the sanction of the Holy Spirit. This was, however, a minority opinion at the Council.

The majority of the churchmen, who were not at home in Greek or Hebrew, were of a decidedly different persuasion. In Sarpi's words,

On the contrary, the major part of the Divines said, that it was necessary to account that Translation, which formerly hath been read in the Schools, to be divine and Authentical; otherwise they should yield the cause to the Lutherans, and open a Gate to innumerable Heresies hereafter, and continually trouble the Peace of Christendom. That the Doctrine of the Church of *Rome*, Mother and Mistress of all the rest, is in a great part, founded by the Popes, and by the School Divines, upon some passage of the Scripture, which if every one had liberty to examine whether it were well Translated, running to other Translations, or seeking how it was in Greek or Hebrew, these new Grammarians would confound all, and would be made Judges and Arbiters of Faith: and instead of Divines and Canonists, Pedanties should be preferred to be Bishops and Cardinals. The Inquisitors will not be able to proceed against the Lutherans, in case they know not Hebrew and Greek, because they will suddenly answer, the Text is not so and that the Translation is false (Sarpi:156).

Furthermore, it was argued,

If the Providence of God hath given an authentical Scripture to the Synagogue, and an authentical New Testament to the Grecians, it cannot be said, without Derogation, that the Church of *Rome*, more beloved than the rest, hath wanted this great benefit, and therefore that the same Holy Ghost, who did dictate the holy Books, hath dictated also that translation which ought to be accepted by the Church of Rome (Sarpi:156).

¹⁹P.S. Polano [Paolo Sarpi] *The History of the Council of Trent* 2nd ed., trans. by N. Brent (1629: 155).

Some said this was going too far to claim that the Holy Spirit dictated the *Vulgata*. Therefore, the Holy Spirit's influence was shifted from dictating the *Vulgata* to sanctioning the authority of the Council itself, which would approve the *Vulgata Latina* exclusively. Here they could be certain the Holy Spirit was speaking.

Finally, a mediating voice was raised. Andrew de Vega, a Franciscan Friar, set forth that the *Vulgata Latina* should be understood as *Authentica* concerning faith and manners, while in some small matters it could be in error. This would also allow for consulting the Hebrew and Greek texts in these problem areas. Here we find the minimalist view taken up later by Bellarmine.

Yet, as the final draft of the statement on the *Vulgata* makes clear, this compromise position did not become part of the decree.²⁰ The majority opinion prevailed. This is further substantiated by the great protest made by those advocates of the minority positions. After the decree was resolved, read to the congregation and approved, Cardinal Santa Croce,

Assembled those that had opposed the Vulgar Edition, and shewed they could not complain because it was not prohibited but left free to correct it, and to have recourse to the original; but that only it was forbidden to say there were in it errors of Faith, for which it ought to be rejected (Sarpi:161).

This qualification, however, as I have said, never became part of the actual wording of the decree. Instead, the decree actually said: "And that no one is to dare or presume to reject it [*Vulgata*] under *any pretext whatsoever*" (emphasis

²⁰Sutcliffe acknowledges this: "Many of the fathers desired an explicit approbation of the Hebrew and the Greek to be inserted in the decree, but the majority considered this unnecessary" [emphasis mine] (40). The majority considered it unnecessary because they believed such approbation to be unfounded. Here the author also refers to another treatment explicating what Trent meant as understood in the early eighteenth century, H. Hody, *De Bibliorum Textibus Originalibus* (1705:509 ff).

mine). And Jedin reminds us that while "many wanted to see the Vulgate corrected on the basis of the original texts (*ad fontes ipsos*)...others set greater value on its text than on that of the original languages" (Jedin 1961 2:84). This latter opinion was that of the majority.

Rome did not respond favourably to the decree. The Roman commission of cardinals resisted the Vulgate decree. Farnese wrote on 29 May, in the year of the decree

it would have been better to leave out the chapter on the authenticity of the Vulgate, but since it has been drawn up we must look for ways and means to tone it down (*temperare*), that is, to explain it further (*dichiarare*), for it is impossible to deny that in many passages the Vulgate departs from the certain Hebrew and Greek text and fails to render its meaning. These more serious defects, which must be traced back to the translator himself, are not to be removed by merely correcting the copyist's and printer's mistakes--however desirable such a correction may be in itself--but by a revision of the Vulgate, on the basis of the original texts (Jedin 1961 2:96-97).

The qualification that the *Vulgata* was *authentica* with regard to "faith and morals" only, must be viewed as an attempt to "tone down" the original force of the decree. Furthermore, in 1546 an attempt was made to revise the decree, which had not yet been confirmed by the Pope. But this attempt failed and "Pius IV confirmed the decree of the fourth session just as he confirmed all the other conciliar decrees, without any alteration" (Jedin 1961 2:96-97).

Clearly two views emerged from this debate: an official view, expressing the position of the majority of the churchmen in this debate (of whom probably none had any facility in either Greek or Hebrew) as found in the wording of the decree itself; and an unofficial position, held by the minority who had been influenced by humanism to some degree, and who wanted the *Vulgata* revised according to the original texts. The latter were unsuccessful in this bid. They had to settle for an *interpretation*, in conflict with the actual language of the decree, that toned it down to mean only in faith and morals was the *Vulgata* to be

regarded as *authentica*.²¹ These two opinions were championed respectively by Pope Sixtus V and the learned Jesuit, Robert Bellarmine, both of whom would produce their own edition of the *Vulgata* in fulfilment of their understanding of the claims of Trent.

C. Sixtus V and the Revision of the *Vulgata Latina*

In 1586, just about the time that Robert Bellarmine may have begun his treatise on Trent's decree on the *Vulgata*, Sixtus V appointed a commission to produce a new edition of the *Vulgata*. This was not the kind of revision demanded by those who insisted the Greek and Hebrew texts be employed. Instead, it was intended to be a revision in keeping with the wishes of Trent, namely, a cleaning-up of typographical and minor transcriptural errors.

After two years, it was completed. When, however, Cardinal Carafa presented the results to the Pope, he was "ordered out of the room with harsh words" (Brodrick: 279). It seems the eight to ten thousand changes were more

²¹On this minority interpretation of the decree, note the opinion of Rongy, expressed before the official ruling of the encyclical of 1943: 'La Vulgate ne peut pas non plus être une Bible frelatée, même dans les parties qui ne concernent pas directement la foi et les mœurs: l'Église l'a employée comme un exemplaire correct de l'Écriture pour toutes ces parties, et les Pères du Concile n'ont pas songé à restreindre la portée du décret aux seuls passages qui énoncent des vérités dogmatiques,' (1927-28:27-8). Also, Emmi admits after 1943, 'C'è da chiedersi se questa netta distinzione tra autenticità giuridica e autenticità critica, applicata alla Volgata secondo il Concilio Tridentino, risponda effettivamente alle intenzioni del Concilio stesso o non sia piuttosto dovuta al lento maturarsi d'una critica esegetica sempre più esigente, la quale, trovati anacronistici i termini del decreto. li abbia voluto rendere attuali con unabenigna interpretazione. Il dubbio così posto ha la sua ragion d'essere, perchè nè il decreto stesso nè gli atti ufficiali della sedute conciliari contengono elementi o determinati dati che suggeriscano con evidenza la distinzione adottata dai moderni,' (1953:110).

than Sixtus was expecting. This would call into question Trent's decree that the earlier *Vulgata* was authentic, as well as unsettle the faithful. Sixtus decided to do it himself.

An insomniac, Sixtus, with the help of a few assistants, worked day and night on the revision for eighteen months. The Pope threw all the weight of his office behind the finished project, as his bull, *Aeternus Ille* reveals:

We, weighing the importance of the matter, and considering carefully the great and singular privilege we hold of God, and our true and legitimate succession from blessed Peter, Prince of the Apostles,...are the proper and specially constituted person to decide this whole question (Brodrick:279).²²

Here the pope claimed papal authority for determining textual variants and the correct translation of the *Vulgata*. The Council declared the *Vulgata Latina* to be *authentica*; the Bishop of Rome now provided the fixed reality. Sixtus had declared further in his bull that,

By the fullness of Apostolic power, we decree and declare that this edition...approved by the authority delivered to us by the Lord, is to be received, and held as true, lawful, authentic and unquestionable in all public and *private* discussion, reading, preaching and explanation [emphasis mine] (Brodrick:281).

By adding the word *private* Sixtus made his meaning, and what he felt to be the intention of the Council, perfectly clear. Contrary to the minority opinions at Trent and that of Cardinal Bellarmine, no private consultation of the original Greek and Hebrew texts seems to be allowed. Instead, he effectively disallowed those who might be inclined to an interpretation that "watered down" the force of Trent's language.

²² This bull was at one time thought never to have been promulgated and therefore was without official authority. The original, however, was discovered in 1907 and it was found to have evidence of official promulgation on 10 April 1590. On this see, P.M. Baumgarten, *Die Vulgata Sixtina von 1590 und ihre Einführungsbulle* (Alttestamentliche Abhandlungen, herausgegeben von Nickel, III. Band, 2 Heft), Münster, 1911; and F. Amann, *Die Vulgata Sixtina von 1590* Freiburg im Breisgau, 1912.

Furthermore, the penalty for attempting to revise his edition, was not only temporal punishment, but also excommunication. Sixtus's Bible was intended to embody, as a printed edition, all the sacredness traditionally accorded to the manuscript editions of the medieval Latin Bible. This Bible would make the transition from manuscript to printing press, through the crisis produced by the humanists and the reformers and would, as a verbal icon, provide the needed certainty that the Roman communion was indeed, the true catholic and apostolic Church.

We now view his bull in a rather ironic light, however, because as soon as it came from the press printing errors and omissions were discovered.²³ The Pope himself spent six months attempting to make all needed corrections on the printed copies. By hand, with painstaking effort, he pasted pieces of paper with corrections over the errors. Before the entire project could be finished, Sixtus died. Still a correct edition of the *Vulgata* did not exist and now there was a papal bull prohibiting anyone from attempting the project.

D. Robert Bellarmine and the Correction of the *Vulgata*.

The bull of Sixtus V was circumvented by claiming it was never officially promulgated. Bellarmine was now given the task to produce the definitive edition. Ryan has judged that "of the theologians of the counter-Reformation, there is perhaps no one who profited more by the historical advances of the humanists than Bellarmine."²⁴ Furthermore, he studied for some time at Louvain, where Erasmus had supporters. While he knew Erasmianism first hand

²³On this see, F. Prat, 'La Bible de Sixtus-Quint,' *Etudes Religieuses* 50-51 (1890: 565-84;205-24).

²⁴E.A. Ryan S.J., *The Historic Scholarship of Saint Bellarmine* (1936:viii).

and was sensitive to its criticisms he was, nevertheless, no Erasmian. Early after his arrival at Louvain, he made it clear that St. Thomas was his guiding light. In this, he reflected the dual influences of both Ignatius Loyola and the Spanish revival of scholasticism (Ryan:60).

Bellarmino's plan was to collect all the copies of the Sixtus edition that could be located, by buying them up, and so suppress it.²⁵ In the meantime, Bellarmine would produce his own edition, working along different lines, and release it as Sixtus's.²⁶ The title pages were nearly identical.

Bellarmino's goal, working with a commission, was to produce an acceptable edition of the *Vulgata* and he was most anxious to complete the work as quickly as possible to avoid scandal. He wanted to keep the project from disintegrating into a source of debate and dissension. This would only result in the project being turned over to the universities--something Bellarmine wanted to avoid at all costs.

Bellarmino wanted a small commission, in order to hasten the project, made up of those who knew the three Biblical languages, who could provide, "a correction of the text of the Vulgate...by a collation with the Hebrew and Greek texts" (Ryan: 169).²⁷ This was denied by the Commission. Bellarmine also wanted textual variants displayed in the margins. Again, this was denied. The project was completed in 1592.

²⁵The same plan was probably in operation for collecting Sixtus's bull, since Baumgarten discovered a few printed copies.

²⁶On the differences between the two editions, see Prat (209-24).

²⁷ It is important to realize that had Bellarmine gotten his way, his edition would have been very conservative, since, "His object is manifestly to defend the Vulgate," having respect for the Greek text, but believing those copies extant in his day to be corrupt (Ryan: 170).

The Sixtine edition, however, would not go away. Eventually the differences between the two editions spawned a number of Protestant polemical tracts.²⁸ The polemics did not end until the encyclical of 1943.

E. Summary

Even into the sixteenth century a medieval notion survived that, "the Vulgate is the work of St. Jerome, and was written in the same spirit in which the sacred writers wrote" (Jedin 1947: 283). To admit that Jerome, who worked under the authority of the Church, was deceived in his production of the *Vulgata* was to admit that councils, dogmatic statements, and, indeed, the Church, could be in error, since all were grounded on this text. Furthermore, it would be to admit that Erasmus, who worked *outside* the sanction of the Church, and who proposed that the Greek text of the schismatic Eastern Church was superior to that of Rome, was correct.

This was fundamentally an ecclesiological issue--the true Church possesses the true sacred text. Rome did not care to enter into a theoretical search for the original text: continuous usage within the Latin Church had already assured that the *Vulgata* was authentic.

Moreover, with the advent of printing came the loss of the sacred adornment of manuscript illumination reflecting the piety of the monastic scriptorium. With this one encounters further steps in the direction of the desacralization of the Bible of the Western Church. Trent's decree was a way of saying no to the humanists, as well as a way of reaffirming what religious communities believed for a thousand years and expressed by way of manuscript illumination--the *Vulgata Latina* was the verbal icon of the true catholic and apostolic Church.

²⁸On this see Brodrick (289-309) and Prat (213-221).

Finally, Sixtus's edition, a magnificently bound and imposing folio, was intended to take the place of the now lost manuscript tradition, providing the Church with the same certainty she possessed before the crisis produced by the humanists, the Reformers, and the arrival of printing. In the end, it only served to prove the Bible would never again possess in the modern era, the sacredness it held in an earlier age of faith.

CHAPTER THREE

Die Ausgänge des Dogmas im Protestantismus. The Protestant Dogmaticians in Response to Trent: The Greek Vulgate as Sacred Text

"...it is undisputed that from the 16th to the 18th century orthodoxy's doctrine of verbal inspiration assumed...[the] Textus Receptus. It was the only Greek text they knew, and they regarded it as the 'original' text."

--Kurt Aland, "The Text of the Church?" *Trinity Journal* 8 (Fall 1987):131.

A. Definitions

1. Protestant Dogmaticians

By Protestant dogmaticians I mean those much maligned heirs of Luther and Calvin from the post-Reformation era of the seventeenth century.¹ They have been discounted since the Enlightenment for two reasons: 1) they resorted to system building beyond what is considered the dynamic genius of the sixteenth-century Reformers. This, in turn, prompted the formulation of creeds and confessions, considered by most today to reflect a propensity for over-definition. 2) They resorted to the Aristotelian method of the medieval schoolmen in their post-Tridentine battles with Rome.²

¹The best treatment of the Lutheran dogmaticians on Scripture is Preus (1957). For Reformed scholasticism in general the most recent treatment is Muller (1987) and on Scripture Muller (1993).

²For a survey of recent literature on this as well as a fresh assessment of Protestant scholasticism see Muller (1986).

What we sometimes fail to realize is that their era demanded such response. Theirs, after all, was a different age requiring a different response to the freshly articulated Romanism of Trent, rather than that of the medieval Schoolmen with whom Erasmus, Luther and Calvin had to contend. It was the special burden of the seventeenth-century Protestants to make certain the Reformation experiment of the sixteenth century continued to thrive within the new context of a now militant counter-Reformation age.

Most of the Protestant theology written at this time, along with the confessions and creeds, was prefigured by the systematic challenges presented to them by counter-Reformation theologians fighting for the very life's breath of the Latin Church.³ If we fail to sympathize with what Frederic Farrar characterized in his Bampton Lectures in 1885 as "a period in which liberty was exchanged for bondage; universal principles for beggarly elements; truth for dogmatism; independence for tradition; religion for system..."(Farrar 1886:358), perhaps it is because we need to reacquaint ourselves with *their* age and its peculiar demands.

³Regarding the Lutherans, Preus maintains, "It is worth remembering that scholastic method was to some extent thrust upon the Lutheran dogmaticians of the seventeenth century. Tholuck has pointed out that a scholastic method was first used by the Wittenberg theologians in an effort to fight the Jesuits with their own weapons" (Preus:xvi). Muller remarks regarding the Reformed, "Note also that many of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century systems devote considerable energy to developing a theology technically capable of refuting Bellarmine" (Muller 1986:194, n.6).

2. The Sacred *Apographa*

By sacred *apographa* I mean the final referent of Biblical authority in the opinion of the Protestant dogmaticians--both Lutheran and Reformed. These are the faithful copies of the originally inspired *autographa*. The latter word is derived from the Greek noun αὐτόγραφα, original manuscripts written with one's own hand; the former word is derived from the Greek noun ἀπόγραφα meaning transcripts, copies from an original manuscript. By sacred *apographa* I mean those copies the Protestant dogmaticians regarded as faithful and authoritative copies of the original as opposed to corrupted or inauthentic copies.⁴

It is not my intention to address to what extent the dogmaticians fairly reflect the position of the Reformers since that is quite another issue, though an important one.

⁴For an excellent definition of these terms see R. Muller (1985) under "*autographa*." *Apographa* does not pertain to translations. Translations were regarded as inspired to the extent they reflected faithfully the content of the sacred *apographa*. Because, however, only Scripture in the original languages can be the norm for theology, the Lutheran Quenstedt argues, "Versions of the Bible are the Word of God in content and words, but the *apographa* are the Word of God in content, words and very idiom" (Preus:138). The Reformed Turretin says, "Although they are of great value for the instruction of believers, no other version can or should be regarded as on par with the original, much less as superior. (1) Because no other version has any weight which the Hebrew or Greek source does not possess more fully, since in the sources [*apographa*] not only the content (*res et sententiae*), but also the very words, were directly spoken (*dictata*) by the Holy Spirit, which cannot be said of any version.... Although a given translation made by human beings subject to error is not to be regarded as divine and infallible verbally, it can be properly so regarded in substance if it faithfully renders the divine truth of the sources [*apographa*]" (Turretin 1981:152;154).

I will begin with the Lutheran dogmaticians. I will then treat the Calvinists, establishing that on the point of the sacred *apographa* we have one more rare category that finds near complete agreement in both families of the Reformation.

B. The Lutheran Dogmaticians

If the first generation of Lutheran reformers could be called "ink theologians," to use Eck's words (Preus:207), because they believed all Christian doctrine should be derived from Scripture alone, the Lutheran dogmaticians must be seen as those who appended a Protestant "*traditio*" onto *sola Scriptura*.⁵

⁵Ladd has observed, "Protestantism thus came very near to adopting substantially the same false principles of hermeneutics, and of the nature of scriptural authority, as the Roman Catholics themselves. To a large extent in theory, and to a yet larger extent in practice, the Protestant theologians set up the tradition of dogma in the place of the fictitious tradition of unwritten apostolic doctrine, as a supreme authority through its influence upon the interpretation of the Bible" (Ladd 1883 vol. 2:180-181). The key words here are *very near*. Regarding the Lutheran dogmaticians Preus is careful to note, "Only Scripture in the original languages is the *norma normans* of theology" (Preus:138). The important parallel between Rome and the Protestants, however, is found in their both making *ecclesiastical* determinations as to the exact locus of Biblical authority. Specific ecclesiastical recensions of the Biblical texts were sanctioned. The Reformed did this by way of their confessions, e.g. the Westminster Confession (1646), The Savoy Declaration (1658), The Helvetic Consensus Formula (1675), as did Rome in The Decrees of Trent (1564). The Lutherans, however, made such determinations in the persons of their dogmaticians and their published statements on the texts of Scripture. As with the canon of Scripture, however, Protestants maintained that they were recognizing God's providence working in and through the Church, while Roman Catholics maintained it was the Church's authority itself which gave the texts their authority and sanction.

The most valuable study of the Lutheran dogmaticians on Scripture is still probably Robert Preus's *The Inspiration of Scripture: A Study of the Theology of the Seventeenth Century Lutheran Dogmaticians*.⁶ The first to respond to the Council of Trent, however, and so begin Protestant scholastic tendencies, was Martin Chemnitz (1522-1586) who is not treated by Preus. This is because, for Preus, the dogmaticians do not emerge in their fullest expression until the seventeenth century. Therefore, we will return to Preus's study after a look at Chemnitz.

1. Chemnitz (1522-1586)

Chemnitz's statement on Scripture is critical, appearing in his exhaustive four volume *Examen Concilii Tridentini*, which appeared during the years 1565-1573.⁷ As a tribute to the importance of this work it is said in Lutheran circles, "if the second Martin (Chemnitz) had not come, the first Martin (Luther) would scarcely have endured" (Kramer 1971:24).⁸

⁶This was a Ph.D. dissertation, *The Inspiration of Scripture as Taught by the Seventeenth Century Lutheran Dogmaticians*, 1952, written under the direction of Professor Thomas Torrance at New College, the University of Edinburgh. It was then published in Edinburgh in 1955. A second edition appeared in 1957 and this was reprinted by the Concordia Heritage Series, St. Louis, 1981 and is still in print so far as I know.

⁷I will be referring to the English translation (Kramer 1971).

⁸A good monograph treating Chemnitz view of Scripture as compared with Luther's is Klug (1971). Klug sums up their relationship on Scripture as follows: "Chemnitz stands between Luther and the theologians who followed after him as a true bridge over which Luther's theology, especially of the Word, was carefully carried, and not as an evolutionary rung in the ladder that led to a structuring of a theology of the Word quite different from that of the

In Chemnitz's treatment of the Decrees of Trent, he recorded the Council's statement on a given tenet and then responded accordingly. On Scripture, Trent set forth its case in the First and Second Decrees of the Fourth Session, on April 5, 1546. In the Second Decree, the *Vulgata Latina* was asserted to be the only authoritative edition of Scripture. The newly restored Greek text of Erasmus was officially put on the index of forbidden books even though the first edition had been dedicated to Pope Leo X and was commended by him.

Chemnitz spent most of his effort refuting the claims of Trent regarding the Roman Catholic Church's prerogative to be the sole interpreter of Scripture. This also included the claim that the Church had a fuller body of authoritative teaching beyond Scripture alone, as found in the on-going oral tradition. Hence, for Chemnitz, the issue at stake is still the Reformation tenet of *sola Scriptura*.

In section seven, however, he begins to address the issue of translations and their relationship to the original language texts:

But what if that common edition [the *Vulgata Latina*] has not rendered what is in the sources, whether it be Hebrew or Greek, correctly, suitably, and adequately.... Will one be allowed to prefer the fountainheads to the brooks (Chemnitz 1971:201)?

The answer that Chemnitz derives from the decree of Trent is "no," to which he replies:

Truly, this must not be tolerated in the church, that in place of the things which the Holy Spirit wrote in Hebrew and Greek sources something should be foisted onto us as authentic which has been badly rendered... and that in such a way that one may not reject them even after he has examined the sources (Chemnitz: 202).⁹

Reformer.... There is no real advance or development, other than a sharpening of thought and formulation" (247).

Chemnitz then refers to the findings of the Renaissance humanists, Erasmus and Valla, on the many problems with the Vulgate. He lists examples of distortions in the Vulgate that seem to support various distinctives in the belief and practice of the Roman Church.

⁹There has been much controversy over the years as to just what the Council of Trent meant by, "precisely the ancient and widely current [*vulgata*] edition that had been approved by long use within the Church for so many centuries...should be held as *authentic*." (emphasis mine) This will be treated in some detail in the following chapter but for now it must be made clear that there can be little doubt that the Protestant dogmaticians understood the post-Tridentine theologians' interpretation of *authentica* as referring to the Vulgate as superior to extant Greek and Hebrew texts when these sources differed. In September of 1943, however, Pope Pius XII released an encyclical, *Divino afflante Spiritu*, defining "authentic" as applying "only to the Latin Church and to its public uses of the Scripture; that it diminished in no way the authority and value of the original texts, Hebrew and Greek; that the decree in effect affirmed that the Vulgate was free from any error whatever in matters of faith and morals and so could be quoted with complete authority in disputations, lectures, and preaching--that, in short, the term had been used primarily in a juridical rather than a critical sense; and that there had been no intention to prohibit the making of vernacular versions from the original texts rather than from the Vulgate." (*New Catholic Encyclopedia* s.v. "Bible," :454) Nevertheless, the first Roman Catholic English translation, the Rhemes New Testament, 1582 (Old Testament translated at Rhemes but published at Douay, 1609), reads on the title page, *The New Testament of Jesus Christ, translated faithfully into English, out of the authentical Latin...diligently conferred with the Greeke and other editions in divers languages.*" This would have left the impression that priority was given to the *Vulgata Latina* over the Greek. Furthermore, even the young Bellarmine did not possess the clarity on just what *authentica* meant, as finally provided by the later encyclical (Brodrick:47). This all seems to indicate development on the interpretation of Trent's decree as found in the later papal encyclical not unlike fundamentalist *reinterpretation* of the Westminster Confession claiming it had reference to the original autographs rather than extant copies. Both this modern Protestant adjustment and Pius XII's 1943 Encyclical appealed to Providence for an explanation for this development.

Up to this point it looked as though the Protestants had everything their way. This was short lived. A very important shift was precipitated by a new debate concerning the pointing of the Hebrew text. I will not go into detail on this controversy, but allow me to sum up what was at stake.¹⁰

2. The Hebrew Vowel Points.

Both Luther and Calvin had admitted the pointing in the accepted Hebrew text of their day could be wrong at times and so felt nothing crucial was at stake (Muller 1980:53-54). When once it was suggested, however, that the system of pointing was the result of the Masoretes and not Moses or Ezra; and because of Jewish hostilities towards the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament the pointing had been adversely influenced by the Jews, *sola Scriptura* began to look tenuous. John Bowman has provided a good assessment of the debate:

It would be quite erroneous...to form the opinion that the Protestants and Roman Catholics held opposing views on the points, merely to be consistent in their opposition to one another. The skein is more tangled than that. In claiming the late origin of the vowel-points, the Roman Catholics saw a way of championing the Vulgate translation as more reliable than the present Massoretic Hebrew text, which latter was regarded by Protestants as the very Word of God. Further, if the introduction of the Massoretic points was late, no one could have learned the Scriptures without the oral tradition of the Jewish church. The Protestants were professed antitraditionalists; they refused to accept the tradition of the Church of Rome, yet accepted the results of the tradition of the Jewish church. In this way the Catholics sought to show Protestant inconsistency (Bowman:47).

In fact, John Morinus, a former French Protestant turned Roman Catholic priest argued, "God gave the Old Testament without vowels because he desired

¹⁰On this debate see Ladd (vol. 2:189-191); Bruce (1970:154-62); Freiday (1979:9-11;89-95); Bowman (1948); Gundry (1967); Muller (1980); Letis (1987A:35-70).

men to follow the church's interpretation, not their own, for the Hebrew tongue without vowels as it was given is a 'very nose of wax'" (Bowman:51-52).

It was the Jesuit Bellarmine who used this argument with the most force. He argued that an earlier, authentic and uncorrupted form of the Hebrew text was employed by Jerome and for that reason only the *Vulgata Latina* can now be trusted (Muller 1980:56).¹¹ As Richard Muller has recognized, this lifted the issue of the *correct edition* of the original language texts "to doctrinal status" (Muller 1980:63). For Protestants this was the ecclesiastical recension of the medieval Greek Church; for the Roman Catholics it was a theoretical textual base underlying the medieval Latin recension.

3. Gerhard (1582-1637)

In response to this claim of Bellarmine and others, Gerhard argued for the providential preservation of the *apographa*:

Divine Providence did not permit those books to be corrupted and perverted; otherwise, the foundation of the church would totter and fall.... Were one to grant that something in Holy Scripture was changed, most of its genuine authority would disappear. On the other hand, however, Christ declares, Matt. 5:18 "Until heaven and earth pass away, not a iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished." Also Luke 16:17: It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void."... Just as Paul testifies that "the Jews are entrusted with the oracles of God," namely, those described in the books of the Old Testament, Rom. 3.2; so too, we can say in regard to the primitive Christian Church that it is entrusted with the oracles of God described in the books of the New Testament. You see, it has received the autographs from the very evangelists and apostles and has faithfully preserved them in the patriarchal churches so that they could correct the copies [*apographa*] and other versions according to the tenor of the autographs (Gerhard 1978:505; 502).¹²

¹¹Bellarmino's biographer assessed Bellarmine as "only an amateur Hebraist." (Brodrick 1961:46)

4. Quenstedt (1617-1688)

Quenstedt took up the theme of preservation of autographic quality in the *apographa* and gave it further specificity:

Our argument runs as follows: every holy Scripture which existed at the time of Paul was θεόπνευστος (2 Tim. 3:16) and authentic. Not the autographic (for they had perished long before), but the apographic writings existed at the time of Paul. Therefore the apographic Scripture also is θεόπνευστος and authentic.... For although inspiration and divine authority inhered originally in the autographa, these attributes belong to the apographa by virtue of their derivation [radicaliter], since they were faithfully transcribed from them so that not only the sense but also the words were precisely the same (Preus:48).¹³

Elsewhere, Quenstedt was even more detailed:

Not only the Canonical books of the sacred volume themselves, but even the letters, points, and words of the original text survive without any

¹²I believe J.K.S. Reid misses Gerhard's meaning when he argues, "Gerhard, on the other hand, is rather stricter, holding that only the original Hebrew and Greek manuscripts are authentic" (Reid 1957:89). Rather, Gerhard quotes with approval Sixtus of Sena who said, "We say that this Greek codex which we are now reading in the church is the very same one which the Greek Church used at the time of Jerome and all the way back to the days of the apostles; it is true, genuine, faithful and contaminated by no fault of falsehood, as a continual reading of all Greek fathers shows very clearly." (Gerhard :553) It appears Reid has confused the Lutheran dogmatician's arguments in favor of the exclusive authority of the original *language* texts against versions, with an argument for the exclusive authority of the original *autographic* texts, a decidedly later position.

¹³Reid also misses Quenstedt's meaning, asserting, "Quenstedt holds...inspiration applies to original manuscripts or autographa, not properly to the apographa" (Reid 1957:88). Yet a few lines later he admits that for Quenstedt, "a good copy is inspired like the original writing"(?) (89). G.W. Bromiley agrees with Preus and myself: "Quenstedt, however, took the even more difficult position that the apographs are fully inspired because the words as well as the content of the autographs are substantially retained in them" (Bromiley 1978:320).

corruption, that is, the Hebrew text of the O[ld] T[estament]...and also the Greek text of the N[ew] T[estament]...have been preserved by the divine providence complete and uncorrupted (Piepkorn 1965:589).

Preus records that both Baier (1647-1695) and Musaeus (1613-1681) were of the same mind:

Baier, following Musaeus, maintains that the apographa can rightly be called inspired since they possess the same *forma*, or content, as the autographic Scriptures. All the apographa have been either mediately or immediately copied from the autographa. Hence to day, in spite of the many codices extant with their many material variations, the meaning or the inspired sense of the autographa is with us (Preus:48).

5. Hollaz (1648-1713)

Hollaz, "seems to go further. He asserts that the very words as well as the content of the autographic texts are today in the apographa. A good copy of an inspired writing is inspired like the original writing" (Preus:48).

6. The Status of the *Autographa*

Preus notes that the decisive issue for Lutherans in this debate with Rome never centered around the nature of the theoretical autographic text;¹⁴ this would grant precious ground to the Roman theologians:

Most Catholic teachers would have granted that the ancient Greek and Hebrew autographa were authentic. They argued that the MSS which we have today, however, cannot be regarded as authentic because, after many years of copying, they have become corrupt and impure. This thought naturally led back to a discussion regarding the integrity of the contemporary text...Bellarmine contended that the Vulgate could not err because it enjoyed the approbation of the Church (Preus:139).

¹⁴"Dannhauer says that it is as needless and foolish to suppose that we must have the autographa today as to think that we need the cup from which Christ drank before the Eucharist can be rightly celebrated" (Preus:49).

One of the major criticisms directed at Erasmus by Roman Catholic dogmaticians was that he was returning to the corrupted Bible of the schismatic Greek Church. Rome's theologians believed, based on the unerring authority of the Papal Church, that the *Vulgata Latina* alone preserved the original content of the autographic texts. In response to this clear-cut position of Rome Quenstedt offered the definitive Protestant response, aptly capturing both the Lutheran and Reformed sentiment in the seventeenth century:

We believe, as is our duty, that the providential care of God has always watched over the original and primitive texts of the canonical Scriptures in such a way that we can be certain that the sacred codices *which we now have in our hands* are those which existed at the time of Jerome and Augustine, nay at the time of Christ Himself and his apostles [emphasis mine] (Preus:48).¹⁵

To this, Preus adds after surveying eighteen of the most important Lutheran dogmaticians of the seventeenth century, "This was the Lutheran position in a nutshell."¹⁶

¹⁵There were minority positions. Preus mentions that Huelsemann relegated inspiration "properly spoken of only in reference to the original manuscripts" (Preus:48). Also, in the Reformed camp Curcellaeus, Cappelus, and Ussher argued that while we could not always be certain of the integrity of the apographic text, no fundamental tenet of the Christian faith was disturbed by textual variants. Curcellaeus seems to be the author of this perspective (although most attribute it to Bentley in his response to Anthony Collins) that would eventually undermine the position of the Protestant dogmaticians. Bentley again takes up the position in England, Bengel does so in eighteenth century Germany and Tregelles employs it again in England in the mid nineteenth century. By the time of Westcott and Hort it has become a near undisputable point among most English churchmen.

¹⁶Preus is understandably a bit apologetic about the dogmatician's arguments for the absolute authority of the apographic texts: "He [Quenstedt] would hardly have considered the apographa of his time in the same category as those which Paul and Timothy used. However, his statement indicates that he is not alive to the significance of the fact of variant readings" (Preus:49). I believe, however, that this position of the dogmaticians was in fact fashioned as a specific

However, because the Lutheran dogmaticians also shared the seventeenth century with a developing, independent, philological tradition--the seeds of which were in Erasmus--the argument "the text of the Bible has gone through essentially the same changes which belong to all other ancient writings," (Ladd vol 2:188) began to take its toll. G. T. Ladd argued that with the arrival of John Gottlob Carpzov, "The necessity...for transferring the quality of verbal infallibility from any extant manuscript or manuscripts to an ideal non-existent text, became more and more apparent" (Ladd vol. 2:188). This new view, however, by no means prevailed within Lutheranism until late in the nineteenth century or the beginning of the next.

C. The Reformed Dogmaticians

1. John Owen (1616-1683)

The publishing of Brian Walton's *London Polyglot* (1657) provided the occasion for one of the most systematic defenses of the *apographa* by a Reformed dogmatician. John Owen, the leading Puritan theologian at the time of the

response to textual variants--those textual differences between the *Vulgata Latina*, which Roman Catholic theologians claimed came from superior editions of the original Hebrew and Greek texts, and the apographic texts employed by the Protestants and given to them by the Greek Church. Someone as early as Gerhard (d. 1637) spends time treating these and other textual variants raised by Bellermine (Gerhard:556-564). Furthermore, from Erasmus, Grotius and the London Polyglot, Quenstedt knew of an entire plethora of textual variants. I believe the arguments in favor of the absolute quality of the *apographa* were arguments in favor of ecclesiastical *traditio* (the Greek Church) preserving the correct recension of the Greek text (Erasmus also believed this but perhaps not with the same specificity as the dogmaticians) in deliberate response to textual variants.

publishing of the Polyglot was distressed at Walton's naked display of every variant to the N.T. text--sometimes with a significant degree of redundancy--known at that time. Owen bemoaned Walton's list of textual variants that took up as many pages in Walton's Polyglot as did his entire N.T. text. To Owen, this constituted both a crisis and a scandal: a crisis because this left the impression the very wording of the N.T. was greatly in doubt, a scandal because Walton had so indiscriminately published this for the world to see. Owen responded to Walton in his essay, "*Of the Integrity and Purity of the Hebrew and Greek Text of the Scriptures*, 1659." In this work, Owen argued the polyglot gave material support to the Roman Catholic position by leaving the impression,

the original [language] copies of the Old and New Testament are so corrupted...that they are not a certain standard and measure of all doctrines, or the touchstone of all translations.... Of all the inventions of Satan to draw off the minds of men from the Word of God, this *decrying the authority of the originals* [the *apographa*] seems to me the most pernicious (Owen 1850-53:285).

Owen clearly understood the implications for Protestant authority in this threat from the polyglot:

Besides the injury done hereby to the providence of God towards His Church, and care of His Word, it will not be found so easy a matter, upon a supposition of such corruption in the originals as is pleaded for, to evince unquestionably that the whole saving doctrine itself, at first given out from God, continues entire and incorrupt [sic] (Owen:302).¹⁷

¹⁷Here Owen is addressing the more moderate position of Cappellus, Usher, et al. which is while the traditional apographic text is not a near perfect replication of the *autographa*, no doctrine is at stake. Ladd notes correctly, however, the rationale of the dogmatists who argued contrariwise, "the Bible is throughout the infallible Word of God, and that, if its text do [sic] not lie before us in autographic integrity, it cannot be the medium for this infallible Word.... It was urged...that, if a single concession were once made to the critics, they would not stop in their discoveries and demands until they had captured the entire field" (Ladd vol 2:188).

Richard Kroll has correctly seen the significance of the *London Polyglot* as the "critical method [that] served at once scholarly, epistemological, and political purposes, forming an early Arminian and Latitudinarian assault on Catholic and Puritan claims to absolute certainty" (Kroll 1986:21). This was a continuation of the Erasmian project begun with the publishing of his critical edition of the *Greek New Testament*, which was "an avowed part of his desire to recall the Church to its pristine origins and to permit the individual to make probable judgements for himself" (Kroll 1986:11). Brian Walton, the editor of the *Polyglot*, had clearly declared in the preface that "Now care is taken that every private man may have [the original texts], and use them as his own" (Kroll 1986:21).

That Walton clearly saw his project as a furthering of Erasmus's is stated quite explicitly in his reply to John Owen, in Walton's *The Considerator Considered* (1659):

This is no new thing, that endeavours to promote the public good should be thus [poorly] rewarded; for in former ages we find, that those who laboured most about the sacred oracles of God, to restore them to their primitive and original lustre, and to wipe off that dust which by injuries of time and ignorance or negligence of transcribers was contracted, and so to transmit them pure and incorrupt to posterity...have yet been aspersed and slandered, their labours calumniated, and their aims perverted.... Erasmus's extraordinary pains in publishing the Greek Testament by comparing ancient Copies and Translations, was sufficiently railed at by some friars and ignorant zealots, as if he took upon him *to correct the Word of God*; as appears in his preface to his Annotations of 1535... (Walton 1821:3-4).

In response to the claims of the editors employed in the *Polyglot*, that certain translations had greater authority at times than did the common Greek and Hebrew texts, Owen defended the *apographa*:

Let it be remembered that the vulgar copy we use was the public possession of many generations, that upon the invention of printing it was in actual authority throughout the world with them that used and understood that language, as far as any thing appears to the contrary; let that, then, pass for the standard, which is confessedly its right and due, and we shall, God

assisting, quickly see how little reason there is to pretend such varieties of readings as we are now surprised withal (Owen:366).¹⁸

Against the claim there is a superior original language text underlying certain translations, Owen argues for,

the purity of the *present original copies* of the Scripture, or rather copies [*apographa*] in the original languages, which the Church of God doth *now* and hath for many ages enjoyed as her chiefest treasure (Owen:353).
[emphasis mine]

2. Francis Turretin (1623-1687).

On the Continent, a contemporary of Owen's, Francis Turretin, was making the same point in his *Institutio theologiae elencticae* (1688). From his post as Professor of Theology at the University of Geneva, where he was appointed in 1653, Turretin argued in his chapter "The Purity of the Original Text,"

This question is forced upon us by the Roman Catholics, who raise doubts concerning the purity of the sources in order more readily to establish the authority of their Vulgate and lead us to the tribunal of the church (Turretin 1981:113).

Like Owen, Turretin refers to the "original texts" as a *terminus technicus*:

By "original texts" we do not mean the very autographs from the hands of Moses, the prophets, and the apostles, which are known to be non-existent. We mean copies (*apographa*), which have come in their name [*autographa*] because they record for us that Word of God in the same words into which the sacred writers committed it under the *immediate inspiration* of the Holy Spirit.... Faithful and accurate copies, not less than autographs, are norms for all other copies...and for translations [emphasis mine] (Turretin:113; 128).¹⁹

¹⁸Note the parallel in language between Owen's appeal above to the common tradition of the Greek Church and that of the Council of Trent's appeal to the common Latin tradition in the Western Church. Trent argued that it was "precisely the ancient and widely current [*vulgata*] edition that had been approved by long use within the Church for so many centuries...should be held as authentic."

for all other copies...and for translations [emphasis mine] (Turretin:113; 128).¹⁹

3. Reformed Confessions

While the Lutherans never codified this position on the sacred *apographa* in a confessional statement, the Reformed did. Thirteen years before Owen published his response to Walton, the Westminster Confession was drafted (1646) affirming,

The Old Testament in Hebrew...and New Testament in Greek...being immediately inspired by God, and by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical. Chapter one, Section eight (Leith 1973:196).

Note that by using the word *authentical*, the Westminster Divines were sanctioning the Greek Church's recension of the New Testament and the common Jewish, Masoretic text in response to Trent which referred to the *Vulgata Latina* as *authentica*.

Later, in 1675, Turretin of Geneva, Lucas Gernler of Basel and John Henry Heidegger of Zurich, composed the *Formula Consensus Helvetica*, which stated:

God, the supreme Judge, not only took care to have His Word, which is the "power of God unto Salvation to everyone that believeth" (Rom. 1:16),

¹⁹Some have argued that the words "immediately inspired" meant that only the autographs were inspired and authoritative. Whereas, while Turretin uses the same language as the WCF, for him the *apographa* also share this quality. Thus Turretin stands in direct opposition to this modern reinterpretation of the meaning of these words as they are used by the authors of the WCF. Furthermore, John Owen, like Turretin, also affirmed explicitly the inspiration and authority of the *apographa* and so recognized no distinction in the language in the WCF between immediate inspiration and the providentially preserved copies when adopting this exact language in his own Savoy Declaration (1658).

committed to writing by Moses, the prophets, and the apostles, but has also watched and cherished it with paternal care ever since it was written up to the present time, so that it could not be corrupted by craft of Satan or fraud of man. Therefore the church justly ascribes it to His singular grace and goodness that she has, and will have to the end of the world, a "sure word of prophecy" and "holy Scriptures" (2Tim. 3:15), from which, though heaven and earth perish, "one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass" (Matt. 5:18). Chapter one (Leith:309-10)

Since the late nineteenth century there has been considerable debate about the authorial intent of the Westminster Confession on this point.²⁰ We know for certain, however, that the *Formula*, just quoted, was directed against developments at the University of Saumur regarding the authority of the Hebrew vowel points. Moreover, considering all the previous testimony surveyed thus far it must be evident that the Westminster Confession is but reflecting what was in the theological air at that historical moment, within both confessional Lutheranism as well as confessional Calvinism. Ladd well summed up the Protestant dogmaticians and their confessions on the status of the sacred *apographa*:

No relief was allowed to the dreadful pressure of the post-Reformation dogma by way of attaching the quality of infallibility only to the original text; for, to maintain the dogma in its efficiency, it was further claimed that the biblical text had been supernaturally preserved in infallible form (Ladd:182).

John Robinson did a commendable job in treating these subjects within Reformed orthodoxy in his Ph.D. dissertation, *The Doctrine of Holy Scripture in Seventeenth Century Reformed Theology* (1971), and here we will just survey his conclusions.

He clearly states that while Calvin held to the infallibility of Scripture, because this was always assumed to adhere to extant editions, "Calvin must have felt the tension between his doctrine [of Scripture] and the problems he confronted in the text, but he did his best to hold to the one and deal honestly

²⁰On this see Rogers (1966).

with the other" (Robinson 1971:37). Unfortunately, because Robinson's desire to prove that sixteenth and seventh century Reformed orthodox theologians held to the modern doctrine of inerrancy, this theme tends to dominate how he uses his data.²¹ Nevertheless, the evidence is clearly set forth by him (though he seems at times to miss its full significance):

The strength of the Reformed position...lay in demonstrating the successful transmission of the original texts to their own day. Some Reformed theologians were so convinced of the Bible's textual purity and authenticity that they apparently did not even refer to the received texts as apographs. Many referred to them as "original texts" which conveyed the impression that they were speaking of the autographs (Robinson:98).

Here Robinson has misunderstood the nomenclature of the dogmaticians because of the modern fundamentalist emphasis on "original autographs." When the dogmaticians refer to the "original texts" they nearly always have as their referent the extant *apographa* or "original *language* texts, as opposed to original *autographic* texts." The confusion was never in their minds, only in a modern reading them through the lens of twentieth century categories and debates.

Nevertheless, in spite of this confusion, Robinson does eventually get it right by acknowledging:

Reformed theologians were not arguing for the obvious authenticity of the no longer extant autographs. Instead, they were claiming authenticity for the received texts which they viewed as equivalent to the original manuscripts, and which they referred to as the "authentic sources," the "first editions," the "Greek and Hebrew originals," the "original texts," etc. The authenticity of Greek and Hebrew "sources" was held to be absolute both in form and

²¹For example when he argues that "the main point concerning textual infallibility was that no errors of any kind were admitted to have been present when the original text was recorded" (41) he does not ever address in this context the issue that was paramount to the dogmaticians, namely, that such a quality was found in extant editions (what the dogmaticians called the *apographa*) and was never relegated to lost autographs such as modern fundamentalists argue. Robinson does treat this issue elsewhere but never seems to fully grasp its significance for the dogmaticians.

content.... In summary, the Reformed theologians held that only the received Hebrew text of the Old Testament and the Greek text of the New Testament were authentic, authoritative editions of the Scripture (98; 101-102).

Like most moderns, however, Robinson passes a bad judgement on the Reformed dogmaticians here because this was

a weak point in the counter-attack upon the Vulgate developed from the Reformed conviction of the full authenticity and integrity of the Greek and Hebrew texts. This provided a vulnerable point for textual criticisms which were to affect not only the status of the versions but the authority of Scripture as well (102).²²

According to Robinson, the defense of the *apographa* was carried on the same basis as that for the canon--"the key arguments were dogmatic.... the demonstration was completed by an appeal, explicitly or implicitly, to the providence of God" (103). This dogmatic claim was then validated by Scriptural exegesis. Ecclesiology was also always close by: "The faithfulness of the Christian Church, the religious views of the Jews, the carefulness of the Masoretes, and the multitude of the manuscripts were also added to the proofs of non-corruption" (104).

Not unlike the Roman Catholics when Louis Cappel published his *Critica sacra* (1650), challenging the integrity of the Hebrew Text, the Reformed

²²This in turn prompted the modern fundamentalist adjustment which now claims that only the original autographs are authoritative, once they have been reconstructed. Muller has commented on this: "It is important to note that the Reformed orthodox insistence on the identification of the Hebrew and Greek texts as alone authentic does not demand direct reference to *autographa* in those languages; the 'original and authentic text' of Scripture means, beyond the autograph copies, the legitimate tradition of Hebrew and Greek *apographa*. The case for Scripture as an infallible rule of faith and practice and the separate arguments for a received text free from major (i.e., non-scribal) errors rests on an examination of *apographa* and does not seek the infinite regress of lost *autographa* as a prop for textual infallibility" (Muller 1993:433). On this also see Letis 1991).

dogmatic response was the *Formula Consensus*, discussed above, which Robinson judges, "represented the general Reformed position" (116).

D. Summary

In summary then, the seventeenth-century Protestant dogmaticians located all the attributes of the sacred text in the extant MS tradition passed on by the Greek Orthodox Church and the Jewish synagogue and which prevailed during the Renaissance. This became the localised sacred text for Protestants. In the words of Richard Muller, the leading authority on this subject

By "original and authentic" text, the Protestant orthodox do not mean the *autographa* which no one can possess but the *apographa* in the original tongue which are the source of all versions.... The orthodox discussion of *autographa* and *apographa* was designed, therefore, to point toward a continuity of text-tradition between the original authors and the present-day texts (Muller 1993:433-434).

Moreover, this was an explicit response both to Tridentine Rome and its claims for the *Vulgata Latina* as well as a response to the early emergence of Biblical criticism amongst Protestants both on the continent as well as in Britain. This position was dogmatically maintained in the isogogics of the day as well as being codified in certain of the Reformed confessions. Moreover, it was also exegetically grounded within the text of Scripture itself. The extant, ecclesiastical recensions of the original language texts, the *apographa*, were, for the Protestant orthodox communities, the sacred text.

Finally, an assumed legitimization of a catholic ecclesiology was affirmed in this dogmatic stance: the Church was seen not only as the vehicle of received orthodox Christology and of the canonical books of the Bible, but also as the "witness and keeper of holy writ" (Thirty-Nine Articles, 29:6).

CHAPTER FOUR

Die Ausgänge des Dogmas im Antitrinitarismus und Socinianismus. The Progress of Erasmianism in the Quest for the Historical Text

A. Introduction

"We by our diligence have smoothed a road which previously was rugged and troublesome, but in which henceforth great theologians may ride more easily with steeds and chariots. We have levelled the soil of the arena, in which, with fewer obstacles, they may now display those splendid processions of their wisdom. We have cleansed with harrows the fallow land which heretofore was impeded with briars and burs. We have swept away the impediments, and opened a field wherein they who may hereafter wish to explain the secrets of Scripture may either play together with greater freedom, or join battle with more convenience."

--Erasmus's preface to his readers in his
Novum Instrumentum, CWE Vol. 3, Epistle
373.

Farrar was quite right to say that "Erasmus may be regarded as the chief founder of modern textual and Biblical criticism" (Farrar 1886:320). But Erasmus's *philosophia Christi* was just as important for providing a non-dogmatic hermeneutic in an era fraught with theological disputes between Protestants and Roman Catholics.

Just as much as Erasmus's non-dogmatic tolerance would be perceived as a reckless and revolutionary formula by both confessional Protestants and confessional Roman Catholics alike, just so would it inspire a vital third phalanx, a new *via media*, that would continue his philological/non-dogmatic approach to Scripture.¹ This *third-way* eventually manifested itself in two directions, what

¹ R. Bainton suggests that Erasmus may have been the first to formulate the expression the "articles by which the church stands or falls," and for him salvation required only a simple affirmation of the the Apostles' Creed (Thompson 1979:viii-vxi.). On this see Erasmus's *Inquisitio de Fide* and C. Thompson's introduction to this volume. Thompson aptly observed that Erasmus's judgment of what constituted the "essence of Christianity" was "an Erasmian solution [which] appeals only to Erasmians," (48) of which the

Hans Frei categorized in his *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics*, as 1) the mediating theology and 2) the theology of the left-wing. Both groups took much of their inspiration from Erasmus.

The first group was a mildly dissident, non-confessional,² body of scholars and thinkers that I see beginning with Hugo Grotius, a non-clerical jurist, who like Erasmus, published his own annotations to both the Old and the New Testaments.³ From within the Remonstrants, whom Grotius supported, others emerged who did not find the creedalism and accompanying intolerance of orthodoxy compelling, whether in its Protestant or Roman Catholic dress,

seventeenth and eighteenth centuries would abound. One of the most reliable brief surveys of Erasmus's influence on what Williams called "the Third Church" remains his third edition of *The Radical Reformation* (1992:41-59).

² By non-confessional I mean anyone or any group that does not subscribe to either the classic ecumenical christological creeds or the Reformation creeds, the latter of which assumed the validity of the former. The Arminians might hold to the ecumenical christological standards but not to the orthodox Reformed confessions, holding rather to their own *The Declaration of the Remonstrants*, drawn up by Episcopius and signed in 1622. The Socinians held to neither the ecumenical standards nor to the Reformation confessions, but rather to their, *Catechesis et confessio fidei, coetus per Poloniam congregati, in nomine Jesu Christi, Domini nostri crucifixi et resuscitati*, Cracow, 1574, authored by George Schomann (G.H. Williams, 1962:703). This is better known as *The Catechism of Racow*, and the first edition intended for English readers was a Latin edition, translated from the Polish edition by Jeromos Moskorzowski of Moskorzów in 1609 with a dedication to James I. It was publicly burnt in 1614 (Bonet-Maury:195). The Unitarians hold to no confession but look to Doctor Lardner's *Letter on the Logos* (Butler:225). The English Arians repudiated creeds. The Deists not only held to no creeds they also felt no allegiance to Scripture.

³ *Annotationes ad vetus Testamentum* (1644); *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum* (between 1641 and 1650).

such as Stephen de Courcelles, who filled the place of Episcopius at the Remonstrant Seminary in Amsterdam from 1643 to 1659.

In England this spirit was expressed by the Cambridge Platonists, and in the greatest scientific luminary of the Enlightenment, Sir Isaac Newton.⁴ They represent a tangible expression and continuation of Erasmianism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The second group was more thorough-going in offering systematic alternatives to orthodox expressions of the Christian faith, such as the Socinians on the Continent and the Arians, Deists and Unitarians in England.⁵ Michael Servetus can be viewed as a kind of romantic archetype of this group.

But for the exception of the continental Socinians who had their own, independent expression, both of these groups differed from the Radical Reformation of the sixteenth century growing mostly out of the bosom of the magisterial Reformation and usually in conscious opposition to the dogmatic formulations of post-Reformation orthodoxy.

For neither of these two groups did the text of Scripture function as a sacred text. Rather, it became a religious text which bore witness to the potential of a higher religious consciousness beyond the orthodox-creedal understanding of either Roman Catholic or Protestant Christianity. Frei has summarized both groups, within the history of hermeneutics, in the following terms:

⁴While Newton certainly was an antitrinitarian, of the Arian sort, he was not so publicly and for that reason I do not list him with the left-wing.

⁵ Lambe has noted one more possible group he terms hacks and sceptics. These are popularizers of criticism in the seventeenth-century *Respublica Literaria*, who trafficked in "rationalism for the masses, purveyed by the printing presses and misused on a grand scale," resulting in giving "a bad name to criticism by giving themselves more 'license' than their method warrants, in order to gain reputations for themselves" (1988:291;286).

Mediating and left-wing parties were agreed that the criteria for what makes sense, as well as what can be religiously or morally significant, were general: whether or not the Bible provides us with reliable factual information, and whether or not this information is what the texts providing it are really all about, the Bible does not provide us with special canons by which religious ideas or claims become meaningful that wouldn't make sense in a wider context of meaning. It is no exaggeration to say that all across the theological spectrum the great reversal had taken place; interpretation was a matter of fitting the biblical story into another world with another story rather than incorporating that world into the biblical story (Frei:130).

This new world was the world of *scientia*, a discipline in which truth appears as rationally verifiable, whereas for the medieval orthodox Church, the Protestant Reformers, Tridentine Rome, and the Protestant scholastics after them, "theology rests essentially on testimony rather than upon the evidence of reason" (Muller 1986:196;201). For Rome this was the testimony of Scripture and Tradition; for Protestants it was *sola Scriptura*. The Protestant creeds, however, provided the proper hermeneutic, acting as a new *traditio*. The new "creed" of this third force was aptly expressed in the words: "If we cannot reconcile all opinions, let us reconcile all hearts," (Butler 1826:259) by a common appeal to what was reasonable.

As Luther and the Reformers (and Erasmus) challenged the "traditions of men"--late medieval scholasticism--as an inappropriate matrix for interpreting the Bible as practiced within the Roman Church, this *third-way* challenged the "traditions of men" as expressed by the Council of Trent, the Protestant scholastics and their creeds. John Jackson, Rector of Rossington, in his epistle dedicatory (1716) to a work written in defense of Dr. Samuel Clarke, the celebrated eighteenth century English Arian, gave classic expression to this revolt against Protestant "tradition":

I cannot but observe, that though the *Reformed Religion* is built on this single Foundation, that the *Scriptures only* are the Word of God, and the Rule of Christian Faith; and that all *humane* Determination of Doctrines, are fallible and uncertain: And tho' the *Church of England* expressly declares in her 6th, 20th, and 21st *Articles*, that the *Scriptures contain all Things necessary to Salvation*; and that therefore the Church *ought, not only not to decree any Thing Against Them*, but not to *enforce any Thing to be believed for Necessity of Salvation, BESIDES* what is clearly reveal'd in Them, or

indisputably prov'd by Them; and that all *humane* Decisions, even those of *General Councils*, *because they may err and have erred have neither Strength nor Authority in Things ordain'd by Them as necessary to Salvation unless it may be declar'd* [or prov'd] *that they are taken out of Holy Scripture*: Yet nevertheless, there have been, and are now many amongst us, and some of these even *wise* and *learned* and *vertuous* Men, who ascribe a sort of *Infallibility* to our Reformers, and think that *Christianity* was by them brought to that full and beauteous *Proportion*, that either to add to or diminish any Thing from *That Stature*, is to render it monstrous and deform'd.... Nothing can be more contradictory to and destructive of the *Reformation*, or more absurd in itself, than to own that the separation from the Church of *Rome* is built and maintain'd on this, that *She* is *Infallible* and imposeth Errors as necessary Terms of Communion and Articles of Christian Belief; and yet to plead for and exact such an *implicit* submission to *our own* Doctrines, as if *We* were *infallible*. (Jackson 1716:1-2;4)⁶

Jackson went on to praise Clarke because his "Explication of the Doctrine of the *Trinity* is most agreeable to Scripture and Reason." Thus, "Natural and reveal'd Religion, have been eminently supported by your learned and immortal Labours against their two grand Enemies, the *Atheists*, and *Deists*."

Of course, these latter two enemies, who also opposed that "*scholastick Notion*" of the Protestant dogmatists and creedalists, made an equally strident appeal to reason as a substitute, finding, however, that Scripture was unable to bear up at all under their scrutiny.⁷

⁶ The German Pietists were animated by the same anti-creedal spirit (though generally orthodox and with less emphasis on *reason* and more on *religious experience*), as evidenced by the sentiments of Philip Jakob Spener, "We blame the Papists for making the authority of the Scriptures dependent *ab auctoritate ecclesiae*. May the Lord graciously forbid that we too should depart from our *principium* of the Holy Scriptures and allow nothing of them to be valid except what is to be found, *iisdem verbis*, in our *libri symbolici*,--still more that we should not interpret the creeds by the Scriptures but the Scriptures by the creeds, and thus set up genuine Popery in the midst of our Church" (Reuss, 1884 Vol. II:578). On German Pietism F. Ernest Stoeffler's *German Pietism During the Eighteenth Century* (1975) remains an important introduction.

⁷ Mark Pattison, in his contribution to the famous *Essays and Reviews* (1860), "Tendencies of Religious Thought 1688 to 1750," rightly assessed Jackson's age: "Rationalism was not an anti-Christian sect outside the Church making war against religion. It was a habit of thought ruling all minds, under the conditions of which all alike tried to make good the peculiar opinions they

These anti-dogmatists discovered, as did Erasmus before them, that an appeal to the Scriptures themselves could be used to overturn misplaced confidence in ancient human creeds.⁸ The confessionalists made an appeal to the church fathers as a witness to the orthodox/creedal interpretation of Scripture. The anti-creedalists were apt respondents who, like Erasmus and Servetus, went beyond, to the era before Nicene orthodoxy, to earlier patristic witnesses, which seemed to them not to offer the kind of orthodox consensus that emerged in the post-Nicene era.⁹

One of the most significant areas of dispute--but little treated--centered on certain textual variants in the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. Erasmus first brought these to light, as did others after him, allowing the anti-dogmatists to suggest that perhaps certain textual data used in traditional interpretations of basic orthodoxy, such as the Trinity, or the deity of Christ, may have been later developments appended to the N.T. text to support a later confessional understanding. Here was a realm of hard, factual data that proved

might happen to cherish. The Churchman differed from the Socinian, and the Socinian from the Deist, as to the number of articles in his creed; but all alike consented to test their belief by the rational evidence for it" (Pattison:257).

⁸ Samuel Clarke's *Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity* 1712, was typical of this approach.

⁹ Cf. Dr. Whitby's *A Discourse shewing that the Expositions which the Ante-Nicene Fathers have given of the Texts alleged against the Reverend Dr. Clarke by a learned Laymen, are more agreeable to the Interpretations of Dr. Clarke, than to the Interpretations of that learned Layman*, 1714, for an example of how these polemics were conducted.

to be no small challenge to Protestants in the same way that Erasmus had challenged Rome.¹⁰

Unrestrained textual criticism, practiced on the Church's sacred text, came to be viewed as the great nemesis of orthodox confessionals, both Protestant and Roman Catholic. In chapter two I demonstrated how the Council of Trent responded to Erasmus's text criticism. In chapter three I demonstrated how the Protestant dogmatists responded to both Erasmus and Trent. In this chapter I will now address the development of the anti-confessionals against the Protestant dogmatists.

It was the Roman Catholic, Richard Simon,¹¹ who presented to the Protestants the question put to Erasmus by his friend Dorp: how is one to determine the correct variant or correct Greek MS. when there are a variety of readings and conflicting MSS. available? Simon made the grand assertion, backed up with skill and hard data in his *Histoire critique du texte du Vieux Testament* (1685), *Histoire critique du texte du Nouveau Testament* (1689) and finally from his *Histoire critique des versions du Nouveau Testament* (1690) where he observes that,

the great changes that have taken place in the manuscripts of the Bible...since the first originals were lost, completely destroy the principle of the Protestants and the Socinians, who only consult these same manuscripts of the Bible in the form they are today.... (Kümmel, 1972:41).

It was this charge that became the perennial nemesis to the Protestants' *sola Scriptura* in just the same way that Erasmus's textual studies threatened the authority of the Roman Church in the sixteenth century. Earlier, Protestants

¹⁰ A comparable crisis was precipitated in Old Testament studies over the problem of the Hebrew vowel pointing. On this see Muller (1980).

¹¹For an interesting overview of Simon's legacy and French resistance to his work, see P.J. Lambe (1985).

themselves had begun to challenge the Protestant Biblical texts as a result of scholarship produced at the University of Saumur, particularly Ludovicus Cappellus's *Critica Sacra* (1650),¹² which "tended to show how untenable was the theory of verbal dictation" (Farrar:387).

The Protestant confessions, as Trent before them, had reflected a self-conscious belief that it is the role of the *Church* to promise certainty regarding what is the final, authoritative, textual standard, and how properly to interpret it. The anti-confessionalist no longer felt the Church trustworthy for the task.

These challenging, anti-confessional groups and individuals had two basic factors in common: 1) their Erasmian hatred of religious intolerance and their dislike of the creeds that gave rise to it;¹³ 2) their involvement with and use of text critical data as a means of maintaining their perspectives against Protestant confessionalism. Most accounts of the history of New Testament text criticism have neglected the latter point.¹⁴

¹² On this development see Muller (1980); Armstrong (1969) and Bowman (1948).

¹³ Lucien Febvre understands Erasmus on this: "Just as he rejected the literal meaning in interpreting the Old Testament, just as he dared to say that even the New Testament--this was one of the boldest statements a man of his time could make--even the New Testament, however historical it seemed, had a life-giving spirit that transcended its literal meaning and its corruptible flesh, so he could envision the possibility that truly superior minds might one day substitute for the imperative-sounding articles of the Creed an interpretation of the higher truths they represented that was at once more profound, more personal, and more humane" (Febvre 1982:309).

¹⁴ That textual variants brought forward by these dissenting groups caused no small degree of alarm on the popular as well as the scholarly level for seventeenth and eighteenth century British confessionalists is usually treated with some degree of amusement today cf. Metzger, (1968:108, n.2); or as a scandal by some in the nineteenth century cf. Tregelles (1854:36-40; 47-48; 63-

What Patrick Lambe has recently noted in regard to the history of biblical criticism in general also applies to the history of N.T. text criticism, "this history is written almost exclusively by heirs of the liberal Protestant tradition...extremely rare dissenting accounts of biblical criticism come from the Roman Catholic camp" (Lambe 1988:271). Traditionally, the accepted account is usually couched in terms of a conflict between a free spirit of scientific enquiry involving the use of hard documentary data; and obscurantist, ecclesiastical dogmatists who are forever resisting such tendencies, out of sheer ignorance or neglect.¹⁵ This perspective finds its roots in the initial conflict between Erasmus and Roman Catholic theologians in the sixteenth century.

While examples of this scenario can be provided in abundance, both in the case of Erasmus and in seventeenth and eighteenth century Britain, it does not tell the entire story. Lambe has illuminated some of the historical forces that played a role in the development of the liberal Protestant interpretation of the history of biblical criticism, noting,

Protestants were particularly vulnerable to overtones of skepticism which accompanied eighteenth-century ideas of criticism, because they had in principle rejected ecclesial structures of authority such as the Roman church represented. Ideas of individualism, though not at this stage entirely developed, were more easily stimulated by the 'think-for-yourself' popularism encouraged by the Enlightenment. This vulnerability became built into Protestant theology and produced a peculiarly Protestant characterization of the development of biblical criticism.... The dialectic base that evolved within Protestantism was part of a wider recasting of intellectual perceptions, subject to the commercial forces of the press and to religious considerations. Controversy was endemic to the period, as was

65; 71-73; 234). It is this judgement, what I call the ideology of harmless engagement, that I wish to correct.

¹⁵ Lambe's point is that because of the confusion of "skepticism" with "criticism" in the seventeenth century, generally criticism was perceived as a destructive force.

popularism. In the eighteenth century Protestantism gradually interiorized this spirit, as its own defensive scholasticism crumbled (Lambe1988:296).

While Lambe paints Protestantism with broad strokes and seems to have in mind the resultant nineteenth century Protestantism particularly, certainly it was Protestantism that made a way for the dissenting, non-confessional groups. More importantly though, he is correct in discovering that it has been by and large the nineteenth century, liberal Protestant perspective on the history of Biblical criticism that has prevailed.

In light of this analysis it will be my purpose in this chapter to show that the traditional Protestant view of the rise of textual criticism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries may be an oversimplification of the full dynamics of the history. From a phenomenological perspective of the Bible as an ecclesiological sacred text we will see that it was the recourse to textual data on the part of dissenting sects and unorthodox communities, reconfiguring the text and reinterpreting it from within a non-confessional, and at times, non-ecclesial context, that alarmed and sensitized both Roman Catholic and Protestant confessional bodies in opposition to the text-critical enterprise. In short, I will seek to rediscover the historical and contextual rationale that lay behind the confessionalists resistance to textual criticism.

This threatening process was begun by Erasmus, probably giving inspiration to Servetus in the sixteenth century. It was then taken up by a fellow Dutchman, Hugo Grotius, in the seventeenth century and carried forward by the Remonstrants. By the eighteenth century it had significantly influenced the English Socinians, Arians, and Deists.

B. Erasmus, Servetus, and the Continental Antecedents

Jerry Bentley, in his important study on the Renaissance Humanists and the rise of Biblical criticism, put the work of Erasmus in a fresh light:

Erasmus recognized that the Christology of New Testament authors was far removed from that of the patristic and medieval Church, that New Testament authors simply did not think Jesus was divine in the same sense as did the Fathers at Nicaea. One might even describe this historical approach as an early attempt at demythologization of the New Testament.... (Bentley 1983:216)¹⁶

Erasmus himself had been cautious in giving expression to this new hermeneutic. He was clearer on this in his learned *Annotations* than in his more popular *Paraphrases*, but he always advocated the same caution for others who thought as he did:

In my opinion many could be reconciled with the Roman Catholic Church if, instead of wishing to fix and define every detail, we were to let that suffice which is clearly commanded in Scripture and is in-dispensable to salvation. But these things are few in number. Nowadays, however, we make out of one article six-hundred--and some of these are such as could be readily passed over or doubted without any loss of piety. If anyone wants to find fault with the divine nature, the hypostasis of Christ, or any abstruse matters concerning the sacraments, let him do so; only let him not try to force his opinions upon others. For the more we pile up definitions, the more we lay the foundations of controversy, because the nature of mortals is such that when a thing has been once established they cling to it stubbornly. By these and innumerable other fine-spun arguments, of which some are proud, the minds of men are called away from those things which alone are at issue. (Cassirer 1953:21-22)

The one would-be Erasmian who needed to take heed to this advice and never did, was Michael Servetus.

Von Julia Gauss has made an interesting and important connection between Erasmus and Servetus (Gauss 1966:417-425). She has noted that even for such a gifted and creative mind as Servetus's, his *De Trinitatis Erroribus* (1531) was a very sophisticated work for a twenty year old. She suggests that a

¹⁶ Bentley has suggested, "Only a thorough study of New Testament scholarship between Erasmus and Wettstein would enable one to determine precisely to what extent the humanists directly influenced the development of philological scholarship on the New Testament" (Bentley 1983:215). This chapter can be considered a modest attempt in that direction.

seasoned scholar lay behind his research and Erasmus seems the most likely candidate.¹⁷

During the summer of 1527, Erasmus was being investigated in Valladolid by the Inquisitor General, Alonso Manrique, on his views of the Trinity and on other topics.¹⁸ One of those involved in the inquiry was Juan Quintana, to whom Servetus was employed as Secretary. In this capacity, Servetus would have had access to all the documents of Erasmus's accusers as well as Erasmus's response, his *Apologia*.¹⁹

Servetus kept quotations from Erasmus in the margins of his work on the Trinity. While the references are few, Gauss suggests this was to save Erasmus from undue criticism. Servetus deliberately sought out Erasmus with the greatest secrecy to present him with the finished work, but Erasmus declined his attention. When Servetus had finished his *Errors* in the winter of 1529/30 and early the next summer he arrived in Basel, he was probably looking for a printer. He no doubt also wanted to visit Erasmus in nearby Freiburg. He never realized either goal. Erasmus tells us Servetus desired a consultation with him, but Erasmus prudently showed him the door (Gauss:425). Servetus no doubt wanted Erasmus's approval (Gauss:419, n. 20).

¹⁷ Bainton had suggested a connection in 1953: "To him [Erasmus] Servetus may well have owed his first religious awakening" (Bainton 1953:33-34).

¹⁸ On this see Rummel (1988) and (1989). A good case can be made for Edward Lee's criticism of Erasmus's edition of the Greek New Testament and Annotations as the cause of this investigation. On this see Rummel (1988:1); (1989:84-86); and Coogan (1986:476-505).

¹⁹ *Apologia ad monachos Hispanos* (1528). For a general treatment of Erasmus's rather voluminous *apologiae* see Gilmore (1971:62-88) and more recently Rummel (1988:69-78).

The main issue in Erasmus's debate with the Spaniards rested on his assertion that Scripture simply did not teach a Trinity; rather this was a doctrine developed by the Church in response to the Arians. He referred to the position of the early Church as superior to the late developments of the fourth century, because the early church left such doctrines open-ended.

Thus, both Erasmus and Servetus shared a preference for the pre-Nicene Church (Gauss:419).

For Erasmus, the *comma Johanneum* (I Jn 5:7-8), was evidence of the late development of the doctrine of the Trinity, since it was found in neither the old Greek, nor old Latin MSS. This influenced his exegesis. John 10:30 reads ἐγὼ καὶ ὁ πατὴρ ἓν ἐσμεν. Erasmus abandoned the catholic interpretation which maintained that the *being one* was the shared divine essence. Erasmus, on the other hand, interpreted this as meaning one in *agreement*. Here his non-dogmatic, philological hermeneutic shows through. Servetus argued for the same interpretation in his work on the Trinity and cited Erasmus as a precedent (Servetus 1932:37).²⁰

Erasmus even resorted to an Islamic argument in refutation of the doctrine of the Trinity. He suggested that by reciting the baptismal rite in reverse order one discovers that the same rank is not given to three persons, supposedly identical in nature.

In the second part of his *Apologia* Erasmus defends himself against the charge of denying the deity of Christ. He points out, as Servetus also would later, that the word *God* is always used in reference to the Father, two or three times in reference to the Son, but never in reference to the Holy Spirit.

²⁰ In fact, Servetus never challenged the *comma Johanneum* probably because this interpretation also served him.

Furthermore, in the early church, most prayers were directed to God the Father, some to the Son, but none to the Holy Spirit. Jesus never worshiped the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the references to Christ as God are confined to John's Gospel. Even John's prologue, though, is not for him an overt declaration, but a passage from which one might *deduce* the deity of Christ. At best, this is a possible reference.

Erasmus went on to point out that Paul always referred to the Father as God, and Christ as Lord--this also had important significance for Servetus. Although Erasmus eventually conceded three possible references to the deity of Christ (John's prologue, Thomas's confession, and Paul at Romans 5:17) all other traditional Christological passages used to prove Christ's deity were denied such meaning by Erasmus (e.g. Colossians 2:9, Philippians 2:6, I Jn 5:7-8), including Isaiah's prophecy of the virgin birth (Isaiah 7:14).

Regarding the passage in Isaiah 7:14, Servetus also found occasion to undermine the orthodox interpretation of this. Once his reputation was in jeopardy, because of his *De Trinitatis Erroribus*, he assumed the pseudonym Michel de Villeneuve and took the job of corrector and editor with the publishing firm of Trechsel in Lyons. One of his projects was to edit a new edition of Pagninus's *Biblia Sacra* (Gauss:542).²¹ Servetus was busy on this project for four years and the final work ran to seven volumes. Servetus, it is believed, wrote the preface. As Bainton observed, "the edition...served only to augment his doctrinal derelictions" (Bainton:97).

²¹ A copy of the contract between Servetus and the publisher can be found in Bainton (97). Sanctus Pagninus took thirty years to produce this Latin Old Testament, translated from the Hebrew text in 1528. This was the first edition of the O.T. to contain the verse divisions now commonly in use. Servetus omitted these from his edition.

In his preface, Servetus rejected the four-fold method of interpretation, holding only to the historical. In this he was in agreement with the Reformers. Unlike the Protestants though, he also rejected the prophetic element in the Old Testament. Here we see first hand, an early expression of a non-dogmatic exegesis.

A few of Servetus's very small-typed annotations in the margin of this Bible are most significant. At Isaiah 7:14 he recognized the traditional *Jewish* interpretation of the Hebrew word *almah* as *young women*, rather than as the Greek Old Testament--used by the early church--had rendered it, as παρθένος, "virgin" (Trapnell:94). Furthermore, at the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah his comments were:

The incredible and stupendous mystery refers to Cyrus because the sublime sacrifice of Christ lies hid beneath the humble types of history (Bainton:100).

While Erasmus felt the doctrine of the Trinity to be against reason, with few statements from scripture that could be used to support it, he nevertheless bowed to the authority of the Church:

Convinced that the Trinity could neither be founded on Scripture nor rationally demonstrated, he [Erasmus] followed the example of earlier Nominalists by taking refuge in a fideistic submission to the authority of dogma.... Their attitude was apologetical, however, and his was critical (Trapnell 1982:94).²²

²² Bonet-Maury observed, "If we examine the passages in the writings of Erasmus bearing upon the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus Christ, we find ourselves confronted by two sets of utterances in direct opposition to each other. Those in the one set tend to destroy the chief Scriptural arguments invoked in aid of these dogmata; those in the other, on the contrary, protest with animation against accusations of Arianism, and display the official dogma.... Erasmus resembles an astronomer who should come and tell you, 'All my observations lead me to think that there is but one sphere in the sun; but the Church teaches that there are three, so I bow to its decisions'" (Bonet-Maury 1884:41-42).

Servetus accepted Erasmus's critique, but rejected his final solution. Servetus took the logical step Erasmus was prudently unwilling to take.²³

Servetus was not content, like Erasmus, with assuming the role of a philologist. He was at heart a religious zealot. He was convinced the reason Jews and Moors did not accept the Christian Faith was because of the Trinitarian heresy. For Servetus, the international success of the Christian cause depended upon opposing the Trinity. Servetus became the Protestants worst nightmare. George Williams observed,

Michael Servetus, of Navarre, was indeed, the veritable effigy for Catholic and Protestant alike of all that seemed most execrable in the Radical Reformation (Williams:3).

Had not the Protestants withstood Rome by appealing to an earlier, pre-medieval catholic consensus? Had not Luther, in one of his earliest public disputations with John Eck, appealed to "the Christians of Greece and the Orient who were not subject to Rome before the Council of Nicaea," as proof that the papacy has not always been regarded as the visible head of the Church (Fife 1957:362)? Had not Calvin, early in his career, answered Cardinal Sadolet in a similar vain:

Our argument with antiquity is far closer than yours, but that all we have attempted has been to renew that ancient form of the Church.... As to our doctrine, we hesitate not to appeal to the ancient Church.... In condemning your gross dogma of transubstantiation...we have not acted without the concurrence of the ancient Church, under whose shadow you endeavor in vain to hide the very vile superstition to which you are here addicted (Calvin 1958 Vol. 1:37; 39; 46).²⁴

²³ Recall Erasmus's rationale as expressed in a letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury, "As to me I have no inclination to risk my life for the truth. We have not all strength for Martyrdom; and if trouble comes, I shall imitate St. Peter. Popes and emperors must settle the creeds. If they settle them well, so much the better; if ill, I shall keep on the safe side."

²⁴ David Steinmetz noted regarding the appeal of Calvin and Luther to antiquity, "Hence, the attempt of the Protestant reformers to recapture ancient

These could have been Servetus's words against Calvin regarding the Trinity, so similar is the indignation. It was Servetus's goal, in line with Erasmus's own exegesis, to further rid the Church of yet one more superstition which he and Erasmus believed to be absent in the early Church, namely, the dogma of the Trinity. Servetus found the further he went back in the history of the Church, the greater the discontinuity appeared between primitive, apostolic teaching and the Trinitarians.

Because of the threat Servetus posed, Erasmus was pushed to affirm his final allegiance to the judgement of the Church. In fact, until the Servetus affair, most of the Reformers themselves, it is fair to say, held a less than adamant position on the early Christological creeds. Servetus provoked two responses from Protestant communities, "the one tending to more carefully defined orthodoxy, and the other to bolder heresy" (Wilbur 1932:xvi). Wilbur continues:

Until now it had not been quite clear what attitude the newly reformed part of Christendom would finally take toward the traditional trinitarian dogma.... Erasmus had expunged from the New Testament the chief proof text. Luther disliked the terms in which the doctrine was stated, and left them out of his catechisms; Calvin had disapproved of the Athanasian Creed and spoken slightly even of the Nicene, and had only lightly touched upon the doctrine in his Catechism; Melanchthon in his *Loci Theologici* in 1521 had hardly mentioned the doctrine except to pronounce it not

doctrine and discipline is labeled innovation by a Church which has lost contact with its own past and which identifies modern belief and practice with the faith and discipline of the early Church.... In point of fact, the Protestant reformers are attempting to keep faith with the ancient teaching of the apostles as understood by the fathers against the later unwarranted innovations and novelties introduced by the medieval Catholic Church" (Steinmetz 1986:92). Servetus just wants to dispense with more novelty than do the magisterial Reformers.

essential to salvation; while Zwingli and Farel, Butzer and Oecolampadius, were far from being sound upon it (Wilbur 1932:xvii)²⁵

Once Servetus's *Errors* appeared in print, however, things changed. Oecolampadius, (with whom Servetus had lived for some months before), at a conference in Zurich, attended by Zwingli, Bullinger, Capito and Bucer, "expressed his alarm at the effect Servetus might have upon their relations with the Catholic cantons" (Williams:199). Furthermore, once the Protestants had finally given full vent to their Catholic impulse²⁶ and bloodied their hands with Servetus's execution, the doctrine of the Trinity took on a new found significance:

In the face of the Catholic criticism which the reformers still feared might have such serious results for their movement, they made haste to assert their

²⁵ On this assessment, also cf. Newman (1925:521-522). Wilbur relates further, "Luther disliked the term homooousios as being a human invention, not found in Scripture, and he preferred to say "oneness". Trinity, he said, has a cold sound, and it would be far better to say God than Trinity. He therefore omitted these terms from his Catechism, and the invocation of the Trinity from his Litany. Hence, Catholic writers did not hesitate to call him an Arian" (Wilbur 1946:15). See Luther's *Against Latomus* (WA 8:117-118) on his disinclination toward the word Trinity. This may be one of the areas Reardon has in mind when he says, "Luther owed more to Erasmus than he ever wished to acknowledge" (Reardon 1966:2). Recall Luther's debt to Erasmus for his opinion on the *comma Johanneum*.

²⁶ "In its basic orthodoxy, an inheritance from Christian antiquity which it in the main never questioned, Reformation Protestantism was at one with Catholicism.... The issues on which they differed were clear-cut. Where teaching arose which undermined their shared positions they vied with one another in their zeal to repress it. It is no exaggeration to say, therefore, that despite the great doctrinal cleavage of the sixteenth century and the bitter theological controversies to which it gave rise, the fundamental unity of Christian thought in the west continued unimpaired until the latter part of the eighteenth century" (Reardon:3). It is my contention that the dissolution started much sooner. It was nearly always Erasmus's New Testament textual criticism that gave impulse to Biblical criticism in general, starting in the sixteenth century onward.

orthodoxy on this point. Melanchthon in his *Loci* of 1535 treats the doctrines in question as absolutely necessary to salvation; Calvin gives them full treatment in his *Institutes* in 1536; and all the Protestant confessions are henceforth unequivocal on this article. Protestant theology, indeed...is more than ever Athanasian (Wilbur:xvii).²⁷

Newman expands on this:

The Attempt of Servetus to uncover Christian errors concerning the Trinity awakened almost universal opposition in the camp of both Catholic and Reformers. Oecolampadius was scandalized and "beyond measure offended with it;" Bucer declared that its writer deserved to be torn in pieces; Luther called it a "fearfully wicked book;" Melanchthon wrote: "Servetus plainly raves when, misinterpreting the text of the Old and New Testament, he denies to the Prophets the Holy Spirit... (Newman:521).²⁸

It was the wise old Farel, however, who made the connection between Servetus and Erasmus's teaching. In a letter Farel wrote in 1553 he relates the account of Servetus's execution.²⁹ He also observed,

But though I do not doubt of Erasmus having been infected in no trifling degree by the writings of the Rabbins [against the deity of Christ], I know that in his later works, at least, he expressed himself otherwise than in those of earlier date. But the unhappy Servetus could not readily be made to imbibe the truth and put it to increase; neither could he be cured of his errors by the sound teachings of others (Newman:603-604).³⁰

²⁷ In fact, Calvin's own theological position on the Trinity was called into question as a result of the Servetus affair, see Newman (604).

²⁸ Newman observed further, "Anti-Trinitarianism was a logical outcome of tendencies set underway by the Reformation; the pioneers of Reform, however, were unwilling to go beyond their early pretensions; hence the extreme position of Servetus aroused their bitter enmity" (522).

²⁹ Farel recounts in the letter the last moments of Servetus's life, relating how when Farel urged him on the subject of the Trinity, "he desired me to point to a single place in the Scriptures in which Christ is spoken of as the Son of God, before his birth" (Newman:603). Yet, in 1525, when Farel had produced the earliest statement in French of the important Christian doctrines, "In this he made not the slightest reference to the Trinity or the dual nature of Christ" (Wilbur 1946:16).

³⁰ In Melanchthon's *Refutation of Servetus and the Anabaptists' Errors* (1559?), his opening sentence is, "Michael Servetus (1511-53), who was a Spaniard who was a follower of Erasmus..." (Melanchthon 1988:169). Oddly enough, one finds Melanchthon, the former humanist, invoking the *Comma*

Bainton reminded us that in an unguarded moment, Erasmus had admitted,

According to dialectical logic, it is possible to say there are three gods. But to announce this to the untutored would give offense (Bainton:30-31).

Servetus, on the other hand, was not concerned about giving offense because to him the doctrine of the Trinity was the greater offense, therefore, "He scorned the mystery as tritheism" (Trapnell:95).

Servetus was convinced that the doctrine of the Trinity could not be found in Scripture (even *with* the *comma Johanneum*). To Erasmus, the late addition of the *comma* was, indeed, evidence that the doctrine was a later development away from the primitive belief of the early Church. On this last point, Servetus and Erasmus were in complete accord.

C. Textual Variants and Later Theological Disputes

The *Comma* became the watershed for those who pledged themselves to be catholic. To question its authenticity, even on purely textual grounds, as Erasmus did, was to open oneself up to the charge of Arianism and heresy. One of Erasmus's Spanish opponents had said,

Anyone who asserts pertinaciously [that the *Comma Johanneum* is to be omitted] must be burned on the stake as a heretic...[and] all of Erasmus's books in which the testimony is omitted are to be burned (Rummel 1989: Vol. II:91).

Another verse that came to play a decisive role in a similar fashion was I Tim. 3:16. The Eastern Church text reading, as found in Erasmus's recension was θεὸς ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκί--"God was manifest in the flesh." There were,

Johanneum in this treatise against the position of Servetus, even though both Erasmus and Luther had denied its authenticity, as he well knew.

however, other, and older Greek MSS. that were not part of the official Church recension which read otherwise. Some of these read simply ὃς--"who was manifest in the flesh." The *Vulgata Latina* read, *quod manifestatum est in carne*--"which was manifest in the flesh" (as did some few Greek MSS.).

The Latin edition did not have as clear a witness to the deity of Christ at this point as did the official ecclesiastical text of the Greek Church. Likewise, the Greek Church text lacked the clearest witness to the Trinity, the *comma Johanneum*. These two variants, one each from both the Latin and the Greek ecclesiastical texts, provided the hard data that convinced later Antitrinitarians these doctrines were later developments within both branches of catholic tradition. It was Erasmus's *Annotations* that usually first provided this damaging evidence. By concentrating on the debates surrounding these variants from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth century, one discovers a window to the perilous nature of the text critical enterprise during these times. To admit these variants were fabrications, was to invite the modern quest for the historical Jesus.

1. Hugo Grotius (1583-1645)

Grotius, another Hollander, is best known for his work in international law.³¹ He was, however, a formidable classicist who also wrote theological treatises and produced a monumental series of annotations on both testaments of the Bible. His advocacy for the Arminian branch of the Dutch Reformed Church placed him in bitter conflict not only with ecclesiastical authorities, but

³¹ On the life of Grotius, see De Burigny (1754); and Knight (1925). A complete listing of his principal works can be found in Knight (291-293) and Butler (1826).

consequently with the state. Thrown into prison for his theological convictions, there he remained for two years (his wife by his side) until smuggled out in a large trunk, used to supply him with books.³² In this conflict, Grotius was able to feel some sympathy for the trials suffered by his kinsmen, Erasmus. Mansfield highlights this:

Essential to the self-consciousness of the Arminians...and Grotius--was the feeling that their controversy with orthodox Calvinists was like, indeed in some ways was a continuation of Erasmus's controversy with monks and scholastic theologians (Mansfield:298).

Basil Hall referred to Grotius as "a new Erasmus for his time" (Hall:112).

Grotius's most recent biographer in English remarked "his treatment of Scriptures was in fact, an active revival of the humanism of Erasmus.... not only a successor and continuator of the work and spirit of Erasmus, but, perhaps his immediate heir" (Knight 1925:252). Trevor-Roper sees Grotius as, "The Erasmus of the seventeenth century: in him, Erasmus lives again" (Trevor-Roper 1987:192).³³

While Grotius wrote several important theological treatises, all of which breathe the spirit of Erasmus's *humanitas*, and are expressions of his *philosophia Christi*, he is perhaps most Erasmus-like in his *Annotations* on the New Testament (Amsterdam 1641). Modeled after Erasmus's own *Annotations* to the

³² One is reminded of Katherine von Bora's escape from the convent by hiding in a fish barrel. Grotius, no doubt, had the better time of it, the fragrance of books being much preferred to that of fish.

³³ "Grotius honoured Erasmus as the man who had been first to distinguish between essential and unessential articles of faith" (Meyjes 1988:162).

New Testament, which he studied while in prison, (Meyjes:64, n. 163),³⁴

Grotius continues a Biblical commentary tradition begun by Valla.³⁵ Before he went to press with his *Annotations* the same apprehension gripped him that was experienced by Erasmus before he published Valla's *Annotations*. In a letter he complained,

I am at a loss...what to do with my notes on the New Testament. I shall easily find a bookseller here; but I am afraid of meeting with some difficulties from the Divines, who will have nothing of this kind published without their approbation: and for my own part, I cannot submit in everything to either of the parties, nor can I be silent when I have something that may be of use to deliver (De Burigny:265).

Grotius's only contentment is in the Erasmian *via media*.

When his *Annotations* finally rolled off the press, Grotius was so dismayed by his likeness appearing in a book designed to inspire humility, he tore the portrait out of his copies and attempted to have the same done to others sold. An advertisement appeared in this work, stating that it was begun while Grotius was a prisoner, finished by him while a private man and published when he was an ambassador (De Burigny:267).

³⁴ Along with the works of Calvin and the Annotations of Theodore Beza. No doubt he was doing a comparison between the methods of the Calvinists and that of the humanist.

³⁵Although de Jonge credits Erasmus as the progenitor of this method: "The New Perspectives opened up in sixteenth and seventeenth century biblical exegesis are clearly seen in the number of philological commentaries of the period. They no longer twisted ancient documents to fit a modern doctrine, by means of logical and dialectical distinctions drawn from Aristotelian tradition, but instead considered the writings of the New Testament as ancient texts which had to be understood in the context of the period in which they were composed. This approach was founded by Erasmus, and its fundamental method was comparison--comparison with other works of ancient literature" (de Jonge 1981:118). Perhaps the best way to put it is to say Valla was the mediating force between the medieval *Glossa Ordinaria* commentary tradition and Erasmus, who truly set the philological tradition in motion.

Grotius, a layman, practiced in his *Annotations*, like Erasmus before him, an extra-ecclesial approach to Biblical studies, what de Jonge calls the *philological* commentary (de Jonge 1980:39-41).³⁶ This approach was developed along side of the ecclesiastical-dogmatic commentary, but "the difference between the two is great" (de Jonge 1980:39). In the dogmatic approach,

The exegete always takes the dogmatics from Scripture which he adhered to before he started...the dogmatic exegesis can be quite a vicious circle: it gives the exegete what he wants and what he knew already (de Jonge 1980:39).

The *philological* commentary tradition, started by Valla, furthered by Erasmus and continued by Grotius "does not so much analyse as illuminate.... [It] explains the biblical text with the help of facts from 'neighboring' literature" (de Jong 1980:39).

Ladd expands further on Grotius's method:

Grotius placed many citations from classic authors parallel with biblical passages, especially with the Sermon on the Mount; and, since he left them without any comprehensive principle of comparison, they served to diminish the apparent originality of the Bible (Ladd 2:198).

This caused Richard Simon to say of Grotius's *Annotations*:

He abounds too much in quotations from poets, and many profane authors; in which he seems rather to affect appearing a man of learning and erudition than a man of judgement and a critic (De Burigny:268).

On this point, however, Simon misses Grotius's intention (perhaps out of envy). Grotius is amassing extra-Biblical sources, essential to the Erasmian project of excluding the ecclesiastical-dogmatic hermeneutic, making way for the *philosophia Christi* hermeneutic of ancient classical wisdom. Neither Simon, nor

³⁶ "It was only outside the church professions that there was freedom to use one's eyes and powers of induction and deduction upon scripture without necessity of arriving at foregone conclusions" (Grobel 1962:409). Ladd acknowledges that "It was...Chiefly by the 'Annotations' of Hugo Grotius...that the ferment of rationalism in exegesis was introduced into the age" (Ladd:197). de Jonge credits Grotius's *Annotationes* to be "the best commentary produced in seventeenth-century Europe" (1981:120).

Grotius, however, could have imagined the direction this new hermeneutic would take toward *Religionsgeschichte*, once developed further by the Deists.

Ladd rightly observed,

The work of Herbert [of Cherbury] 'De religione Gentilium', announces several views which would now be accepted by most students of comparative religion: such as that there are certain fundamental beliefs of all religion to be distinguished, that there has been a 'universal divine providence,' and that the enlightened religious consciousness affords a test of religious truth (Ladd 2:201).

In short, this tradition did not search for an over-arching Biblical theology, but rather searched for significant parallels with Greco-Roman intellectual traditions.

This distinctly non-ecclesiastical tradition of Biblical commentary was new in the history of Bible study. Rudolf Pfeiffer in his seminal *History of Classical Scholarship* (vol. 2) acknowledged,

it was on the Erasmian model...that true scholarship prospered, not on that of the biblical exegesis of the reformers and the new Protestant Scholasticism, still less in the narrow traditionalism of the Catholic counter-reformation (Pfeiffer 1976:82).³⁷

With Grotius's *Annotations*, we discover it is seventeenth-century, Arminian Holland where first, "the nursery of critical and exegetical freedom is to be found" rather than nineteenth century, Lutheran Germany (Knight:246). Furthermore, while in exile in France Grotius stayed in touch with the Arminian Church in Holland, allowing him,

to carry on and develop the original Arminian tradition and to reject without fear the idol of verbal inspiration of both Lutherans and Calvinists--the first great obstacle to progress...(Knight:246).

The foundational principle that set the Valla/Erasmus/Grotius *Annotations* tradition apart from the ecclesiastical approach was a deliberate suspension of the notion of the Bible as a sacred text. The findings of a text critical study of the

³⁷ I am indebted to Jerry Bentley (1983) for this reference.

Bible allowed for this liberation, negating the possibility for a verbal view of inspiration. It was the doctrine of verbal inspiration that gave the Bible its status; it was text criticism that took it away. Instead, Grotius treated, "the Scripture as if they were no more than a mere literary work. He approached them as he would any work of classical antiquity" (Knight:250).

2. The Trinitarian Variants in Grotius's Annotations: I John 5:7-8 and I Timothy 3:16

On the two textual variants under consideration, Grotius follows Erasmus's judgement. Regarding the *comma Johanneum*, Grotius notes that the ancient MS. he uses lacks this witness to the Trinity. Furthermore, he has checked both the Syriac and the Arabic versions,--and in this he has surpassed Erasmus who had no facility in these languages--and neither do they contain this passage. He next offers a bold theory to account for this, one that flies directly in the face of the traditional orthodox version of the story.

He posited that the Arians did not omit this passage, as supposed by the orthodox, in order to do away with the Trinity. Rather, the Arians corrupted the text by *interpolating* the *comma* at this place, from which they could infer that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not one, except in their concord, analogous to the Spirit, water and blood who together bear the same testimony (Grotius 1756:1104).

It was, therefore, the Catholics who removed the *comma* originally, leaving, however, "three are one" because this supported their theology. This is a brilliant and hitherto unheard of interpretation of the data. He provided both the Erasmian interpretation of the *comma* (i.e. a concord of witness, not essence)

which stripped it of its witness to the Trinity, while making way for the excising of the passage as an heretical corruption of the text.

Regarding I Tim. 3:16, Grotius is certain the orthodox reading, θεὸς is suspect because in all the Greek MSS. he has surveyed, along with the Latin, Syriac, Arabic and Ambrose, all read either ὃς, "who" or *quod* "which." He has even discovered an ancient reference which claims θεὸς was added by the Nestorians (Grotius:766-767).

Grotius's rejection of these two key proof texts for the Trinity and the deity of Christ naturally led to charges of Socinianism. Grotius did read Socinians and corresponded with them as well. Moreover, while Grotius was in exile in Paris, he met regularly with Socinian students (Wilbur 1946:549). Yet, no more can be said from this than that he learned a tolerance and respect for Socinians.

Nevertheless, his non-confessional approach to Biblical studies was a service to the Socinian cause. By questioning the authenticity of the two most important Orthodox proof texts, he invited severe criticism from churchmen, less acquainted with the first-hand textual data. The Lutheran, Abraham Calov, in his *Biblia illustrata* (4 vols. 1672-1676), "was full of hatred of Grotius," whom he regarded as *nullis religiosus* (Knight:251). The Calvinist, John Owen, while never calling Grotius a Socinian, freely expressed his opinion that his *Annotations* supported Socinianism:

I know no reason why our students should with so much diligence and charge labour to get into their hands the books of Socinus...seeing these Annotations as to the most important heads of Christian religion, about the deity of Christ, sacrifice, priesthood, and satisfaction of Christ, original sin, free will, justification, etc. afford them the substance and marrow of what is spoken by them (Owen 1850-1855 Vol. 12:629).

Specifically regarding the deity of Christ, Owen concluded,

The consideration of the charge on the Annotations relating to their tampering with the testimonies given in the Scripture to the *Deity of Christ*...the sum of what is to this purpose by me affirmed is, that in the

Annotations on the Old and New Testament, Grotius hath left but one place giving testimony clearly to the deity of Christ (Owen 12:629; 630-631).³⁸

Grotius's non-dogmatic, extra-ecclesial, *philological* Annotations pushed forward the Erasmian project a bit further. Such progress could always be measured in terms of how much outrage was expressed by churchmen and theologians within the catholic tradition, whether Roman or Protestant. Erasmus had found only two clear references to the deity of Christ; Grotius had reduced this to one. The significance of this for Grotius is not that there still remained *positive* evidence, but that the many other traditional proof texts can no longer bear the weight of the orthodox tenets. Some of these are now suspect as late interpolations, key textual evidence that theological development has taken place.

Moreover, because Grotius was working from an early *Religionsgeschichte* approach, there was nothing sacred about the form of the text handed down by the Church. His investigations, aided by Erasmus's own *Annotations*, had revealed Catholic development on the issue of the Trinity. Kümmel finds great significance in what follows from this for the history of Biblical criticism:

Grotius undertakes...to explain the inherent difficulties of a text on the assumptions that the text in the form in which it has been handed down does not correspond to the original, or that the traditional view concerning the time of composition or the authorship of a letter must be abandoned.... What is important in this connection is...that Grotius makes any use at all of historical conjecture as a tool of New Testament interpretation, and does so because he believes that only so can the historical setting of a New Testament document be clearly understood (Kümmel 1972:35-36).

This lesson he has learned from Erasmus. Once textual criticism exposes the fact that the sacred text is not *sacred*, one is pushed to reconstruct original content based on the analogy of other religious or literary texts. Furthermore, if the ecclesiastical texts are untrustworthy, the dogma resting on them is now

³⁸ For other references to Grotius in Owen, see of his collected works (Vol. 5:201; 182); (Vol. 15:13); (Vol. 3:34); (Vol. 16:352; 387-88; 420-21).

subject to revision, or negation. This is *particularly* the case if these *dogmata* have been the source of religious strife and persecution--the blight from which Erasmus, Grotius and all Antitrinitarians suffered.

Grotius pushed open a little further the door leading to a more primitive, Erasmian catholicism:

Erasmus had tried to preserve the endangered catholicity of religion and learning, and had devoted all his scholarship and humanism to the promotion of the universal church and its spiritual leadership of the whole of Christendom (Pfeiffer:127).

And it was Grotius's goal in his work in international law, to offer a "secularization of the Erasmian ideas...in the place of the lost universality of the church."³⁹ Grotius desires "a Christian humanistic society of nations" (Pfeiffer:128).

Here we have a clear development of Erasmus's project, served in a large measure by textual criticism.

3. Stephanus Curcellaeus (1586-1659)

Stefan de Courcelles, or Stephanus Curcellaeus, as he liked to be called, offered another important step forward away from the ecclesiastical approach to the Biblical text. Born in Geneva of a noble French family long established in Picardy, because his father died while young, Curcellaeus was brought up by a Calvinistic pastor, Charles Perrot. He was tutored in Greek by the famous

³⁹ While Grotius was not the founder of the modern theory of natural law (see Chroust:1943), in his dictum *etiamsi daremus non esse Deum* (natural law would retain its validity even if God did not exist), "Grotius' aim was to construct a system of laws which would carry conviction in an age in which theological controversy was gradually losing the power to do so" (d'Entreves 1967:52).

Theodore Beza. He became a pastor, but because he refused to sign an oath to the Synod of Dort, he was forced to resign. The oath was changed, however, and so he was then able to sign the doctrinal statement, only to find his orthodoxy still of perennial interest to some.

Like so many others who chafed under the seventeenth century credalism, he left his home in France and moved to the more tolerant climate of Remonstrance Holland.⁴⁰ He soon gained a professorship at the Arminian seminary in Amsterdam.

Curcellaeus's works played a major role in assisting Jean Le Clerc, his great nephew (1657-1736), from Calvinism to Arminianism (Le Clerc 1712:7) (Mansfield:248). Curcellaeus was also a friend and admirer of Descartes and produced the first Latin translation of his *Discourse Upon Method* (1644), "Thus enabling the essay to serve as a textbook for all Europe" (Colie 1957:51).

Hulbert-Powell observed of the three great Arminian scholars,

De Courcelles, le Clerc and Wettstein, all three sought freedom in the interpretation of Scripture from the bias of ecclesiastical formulae, and they all found it in the Remonstrant Brotherhood.... All three suffered from the opposition of the Contra-Remonstrants" (Hulbert-Powell 1937:142-143).

Wettstein "attributes to him [Curcellaeus] the revival of interest in the critical study of the text of the Greek Testament" (Fox 1954:52).⁴¹

⁴⁰ Erasmus's eighteenth-century biographer, Jortin, records Erasmus's opinion of the Dutch of the sixteenth century as "sordid, unpolished, despisers of learning, which meets there with no encouragement, and much envy." He then adds that by Le Clerc's day, however, Holland had "become the asylum of letters since the beginning of the seventeenth century; and it may be affirmed, that, during that age, no country hath furnished so many succours to Europe for the advancement of literature" (Jortin 1758:15-16). Jortin's biography was based on that of Le Clerc's. For a further treatment of the Dutch academies, see de Jonge (1981).

⁴¹ For brief treatments of Curcellaeus, see Hulbert-Powell (1937:137, n.4; 139-142); Fox (49-52), and B.W.D.N. (1858:780-783). A monograph on

In 1658, Curcellaeus published at the famous Elzevir Press, his own edition of the Greek New Testament. It was the first edition, produced by a known editor, to regard the *comma Johanneum* as inauthentic (he placed the passage in brackets), since Erasmus left it out of his first two editions (1516 and 1519).⁴²

Curcellaeus prepared his readers for the somewhat different approach he intended to take toward textual variants (as compared to his teacher, Theodore Beza), in a highly celebrated preface to his edition (Curcellaeus: 1675). He begins by expressing his displeasure that textual variants have not been sufficiently acknowledged in previous editions. This is important for him because as he reads the early fathers he notes their testimony of careless scribes creating textual variants that have crept into the text. Furthermore, previous editors have made a choice between these textual variants in a rather arbitrary way, and have not provided in their editions, the various textual options available to them. Curcellaeus wants a full disclosure of these variants so that all may make their own choice. Only in Remonstrance Holland, at this point in history, could such an appeal seem reasonable. He is not, however, demanding this for purely theoretical reasons.

Curcellaeus, like Erasmus and Grotius before him, had suffered at the hands of nervous confessional churchmen.⁴³ For orthodox Protestants, as well as

Curcellaeus is in preparation by two University of Leiden scholars, Professor E.J. Kuiper and Dr. Chr. Berkvens-Stevelinck.

⁴² An anonymous edition was produced in Paris in 1534, published by Simon de Colines, which left out the *comma*, but the editor is unknown. On this see Parker (1971:97-102).

⁴³ Fox speaks of his having been "persecuted out of France" (49).

Roman Catholics, the very bedrock of their theological certainty was the verbal dictation theory of inspiration. It was this view that gave the Bible its uniqueness in the Church as a *sacred* text. It was this paradigm that textual variants unsettle. Farrar, in his characteristic style, puts this into focus:

Among the extravagances of reformed theology [and Lutheran theology as well] had been an assertion as to the miraculously perfect integrity of the text.... Robert Stephens said that he had found 2,384 variations in the oldest MSS. of the New Testament.... these facts tended to show how untenable was the theory of verbal dictation (Farrar:387).

It was against this ecclesiastical concept of the Protestant texts as a divinely dictated "Oracle" that Curcellaeus wrote. His goal was to emphasize the need to take seriously the many textual variants in the New Testament MSS and therefore the characteristics they shared with other kinds of literature. Curcellaeus is concerned about the suppression of these variants in earlier editions. He cites the scholastic Reformed theologian and his former Greek teacher, Theodore Beza, particularly as one who has deliberately suppressed certain textual variants. He is concerned that the Biblical text be approached, not as a sacred text, but as critics have worked with profane authors.⁴⁴

While this desacralization of the Bible may be distressful to the orthodox, Curcellaeus feels that only if an unrestrained, full disclosure of all textual variants is followed will it become apparent that certain passages from ancient times are nowadays not read in the same way in all copies. Hitherto this has been addressed by covering-up the facts.

Nevertheless, he assures his readers that while the orthodox may try to hold on to certain questionable passages for answering heretics, e.g. the *comma Johanneum*, they need feel no loss if they prudently let them go, since important

⁴⁴ It is not just within the Protestant ecclesiastical texts that he wants a full disclosure of textual variants, but in the Roman *Vulgata Latina* as well.

doctrines are always found in a clear plurality of passages. No important facet of the Christian Religion will be lost by this process. This is a vital point.

Within the history of the discipline of New Testament text criticism, it is usually the safe Richard Bentley who is credited with this original emphasis, this ideology of harmless engagement, in his response to the Deist, Anthony Collins.⁴⁵ Here, nearly fifty years earlier, we have the Socinian Curcellaeus making the point, in order to encourage the orthodox not to fear textual variants as a threat to their orthodoxy. Ironically, Bentley will make the same point in reply to a Deist who argued that textual variants completely undermine the possibility of a revealed religion.

Curcellaeus does his best to gather as many variants as he can collect and displays them in his edition (at the foot of the page as well as in a section at the end of the text). With regard to the two doctrinal passages we have been highlighting, the one supporting the Trinity in the Latin Bible, and the other the Deity of Christ in the Greek Bible, Curcellaeus rejects them both.⁴⁶ He places the *comma Johanneum* in brackets, mentioning in a note that the words are not found in the early Greek and Latin MSS., nor in the Syriac, Arabic, Ethiopic versions, nor in most church fathers. He concludes by saying they are even missing from early published editions of the Greek New Testament (these would be Erasmus's first two editions and that of Colines).

On I Tim. 3:16, in his textual note he mentions, like Grotius, "the ancient manuscript" reads "he" rather than "God" was manifest in the flesh and that the

⁴⁵ This is found in Bentley's *Remarks Upon a Late Discourse of Free-Thinking* Cambridge, 1713. I will be treating this under the heading Richard Bentley.

⁴⁶ Although, interestingly, he defends the long ending of Mark's Gospel, believing heretics were responsible for its omission in some sources.

Latin, Arabic and Syriac versions also leave out "God." Furthermore, he notes that Morinus has discovered in the margin of an ancient MS. an attempt to insert the word "God," but that the false emendation is easily spotted.

Moreover, like Grotius, Curcellaeus was criticised as a Socinian (for Erasmus, it was as an Arian). Maresius, a Groningen Professor, accused him of being a Socinian and an anti-trinitarian.⁴⁷ Also, the Lutheran J.W. Rumpaeus, in his *Commentatio Critica* (1757:260-261) noted that it was Curcellaeus's third edition of his Greek New Testament (1685) that was followed by the Socinian Felbinger, in his German translation of the Scriptures. Furthermore, Rumpaeus criticizes Curcellaeus because he needlessly multiplied the number of variant readings, many of which, Curcellaeus freely admitted in his preface, arose from sheer conjecture,⁴⁸ and especially those which are pleasing to the Socinians (Rumpaeus:261).

Rumpaeus cites specifically the *comma Johanneum* and other proof texts, most of which had also been rejected as supports for the deity of Christ by Erasmus and Grotius.⁴⁹ He fears, ironically, that Curcellaeus has chosen variants at random and indiscriminately from MSS.--this was precisely Curcellaeus's accusation of the orthodox--with no prior consideration as to whether they were

⁴⁷ This was in response to Curcellaeus's, *Quaternio dissertationum de vocibus trinitatis, hypostaseios, personae, essentiae, adversus Sam. Maresium*, Amsterdam, 1658 (B.W.D.N. 1858:780-783).

⁴⁸ These are reconstructions of the text without any reference to MS evidence, based on the assumption that at this point, all copies are corrupted. Wettstein discovered no less than forty of these conjectures in Curcellaeus's edition (Fox:51).

⁴⁹ For example, John 10:30; 17:11-22; Romans 9:5; I John 5:20; John 17:3.

in *public* use, or merely *private* use. In turn, it is Curcellaeus who has suppressed evidence that would support the received reading (*sanam lectionem*).

It is important to recognize the significance of Rumpaeus's distinction between private MSS. and public MSS. The public texts usually represent those sanctioned by ecclesiastical usage, while private MSS. with independent variants would be treated with some suspicion by a churchman.

An entire dissertation was written in Germany discovering the Socinianism in Curcellaeus's edition of the Greek New Testament, prompted no doubt in part by the German Socinian translation based upon Curcellaeus's edition.⁵⁰ The alarm raised by Curcellaeus's edition, particularly his textual conjectures, caused S.P. Tregelles in the mid-nineteenth century to admit that since these conjectures,

were theological and such as touched vital points, their appearance had an unhappy effect, for it caused criticism (with which such conjecture was thus confounded) to be deprecated as *dangerous* (Tregelles 1856:125).

What Tregelles failed to grasp in the milder climate of mid-nineteenth century Britain is that the non-confessional scholars in Holland (and later in Germany) were convinced they had evidence of textual interpolation supporting orthodox theology. These data convinced them that one *must* acknowledge textual, and consequently, theological development. If such development could be proven on the lower critical level in certain key passages, this evidence would beg the suspicion that other such corruptions have taken place, perhaps with less, or no evidence remaining. Thus conjecture was not only appropriate, it was absolutely necessary to get behind the official church texts in order to reconstruct the *Urtext*. Such suspicion was always first bred at the lower, or text

⁵⁰ John Gottlieb Moller, *Curcellaeus in editione originalis Novi Testamenti textus variantium lectionum et parallelorum Scripturae locorum additamenta vestita, Socinians*, Rostock 1696.

critical level. This explains in part why, the very conservative Tregelles felt it necessary to deprecate Curcellaeus's efforts.

D. Neglected Roots of English Socinianism, Arianism and Deism

Thus far, I have plotted the development of an Erasmian influenced text criticism on the continent. Not unexpectedly we find this influence to be one of the primary movers and sources of inspiration for a British, extra-ecclesial tradition of biblical studies, particularly among the Antitrinitarian sects. Bonet-Maury rightly observed,

If Erasmus was not Unitarian, in the proper sense of the term, he at any rate, by his strictly philological exegesis, supplied weapons to the adversaries of the Trinity, particularly to the Anabaptists of the Low Countries (43).

Furthermore,

Among scholars, his [Erasmus's] text of the New Testament, in a far wider circle his exegetical Annotations, diffused anti-trinitarian modes of thought. If ever the Dutch and English Anabaptists, who disowned for the most part the doctrine of the Trinity, departed so far from their rigid Scripturalism as to cite a human authority in their defense, it was under his writings that they sheltered their heresy. His influence, moreover, entered as a factor into the Arminianism of Holland, and through this, as well as directly, into the Socinianism of Poland, and thence again into the Latitudinarianism of England (xii).

One very clear example of Erasmus's influence among the Transylvanian Antitrinitarians is found in Ferenc David (1510-1579). The author of *De falsa et vera unius Dei Patris, Filii et Spiritus Sancti cognitione* (1567), he began as a Roman Catholic, moved to the Lutheran camp and eventually became the bishop of a Calvinist community in Kolozsvár and court preacher to King John Sigismund, himself a Unitarian. Converted to Unitarianism with the help of the Italian Georgius Blandrata by 1567 he was on his way to transforming the community at Kolozsvár into a hotbed of Unitarianism.

For a season he was able to achieve religious toleration from the state, but once the Catholic Stephen Báthory came to the throne David was arrested and condemned to prison for life as a blasphemer for refusing to worship Christ. After a year in prison, he died there for his faith

In search of a primitive Christianity, "he set out with the idea of going back to the Scripture and, on that basis, restoring Christianity to something more like early Christianity" (Erdo 1982:48). In his quest he read, among other things, Erasmus's *Novum Instrumentum* (1516). Originally holding to the traditional catholic view of verbal inspiration, as a result of "the influence of humanist philology," he gave up this view.

It was specifically Erasmus's text criticism that David highly praised, because it was in Erasmus's Greek N.T. that he learned of the critically important data regarding the interpolation of the *comma Johanneum*, referring quite specifically to this in an extant sermon (Erdo:49). Here we see such textual studies were not for him something reserved for purely academic purposes, rather, they played an important role in demonstrating, on a popular level, the belief in the Catholic corruption of even the Biblical manuscripts themselves in favor of Trinitarianism.

That David is not untypical of the kind of influence Erasmus's N.T. had in Transylvania, the Jesuit, Antonio Possevio, who had first hand knowledge of the conditions in Transylvania during this time, declared that one of the sources of Antitrinitarianism there "was to be found in Erasmus' teaching" (Erdo:49).

In the sixteenth century and beyond, Erasmus was forever being claimed by the advocates of Antitrinitarianism as the founder of their movement. Another Transylvanian Antitrinitarian, Biandrata, along with Ferenc David, saw "Erasmus...fitted into a kind of apostolic succession" (Mansfield:109) leading to their community. In *De falsa et vera* David stated that, "Indeed in our own time

did not Erasmus of Rotterdam, a most learned man, neglect nothing to uncover the vanity of this teaching about God [i.e. the Trinity], as readers may see in his *Annotations*?" (Mansfield:110).

Bellarmino also found Erasmus a helper of the Arian cause, calling him, Lo, the distinguished protector of the Arians who vindicates them from heresy and makes them more learned than the Catholics. What else remains but to call the Arians Catholics and the Catholics heretics (Mansfield:54).⁵¹

Bellarmino is typical of much of the polemical literature hurled at Erasmus while he was alive, nearly all of which eventually got around to his "Arianism."⁵²

The same proved to be so in England where again Erasmus and Grotius, in Sullivan's words, head the "alternative apostolic succession":

Above all, the Unitarians looked to Erasmus, 'who, 'tho he lived considerably before Socinus commonly interprets that way,' as the first modern exponent of their position. The English Unitarians thereby sought to demonstrate that they, too, accepted the Erasmian strain of piety (Sullivan 1982:86).

The seventeenth-century English Jesuit, Robert Persons, in his unpublished MS., *Certamen ecclesiae Anglicanae* says of Erasmus, only "scoffers, heretics, and atheists read his books; the pious do not" (Thompson 1969:63). Moreover, he reminds us that Erasmus's tomb remains unhonored by "both sides" in Basel (at which Erasmus would be neither surprised nor disappointed). Persons attributes Erasmus's obedient submission to the authority of the Roman Church, solely to the prayers of his friend, St. Thomas More. In spite of this, however,

⁵¹ While Richard Simon did not doubt Erasmus's essential orthodoxy, because, like Simon himself, Erasmus remained faithful to the Church, Simon nevertheless also saw in Erasmus's *Annotations* the source that contributed to a revived Arianism (Mansfield:177).

⁵² On the polemical literature against Erasmus on this point see Gilmore (1971:62-88) and Rummel (1989).

Erasmus had much to answer for...not only Luther and Lutherans, but all the pestilent sect of new Arians of our own days began upon certain doubtful questions and interpretations of Erasmus...(Thompson 1969:63).⁵³

This was not just an example of a Jesuit exercising his polemic against Erasmus. He is describing a reality. Rev. Stephen Nye, the first to employ the word *Unitarian* on the title page of a work in English (McLachlan 1951:320)⁵⁴ and himself a Sabellian, wrote in 1687 in his *A Brief History of the Unitarians Called also Socinians*⁵⁵:

D. Erasmus, the restorer of learning, hath given occasion both to his friends and enemies to think him an Arian. He saith, that Phil. 2:6 was the principle argument of the Fathers against the Arians; but that to say true, it proves nothing against them. He notes on Eph. 5:5 that the word *God* being used absolutely, doth in the Apostolic Writings always signifies *the Father*. In his *Scholia* on the third tome of St. Jerome's epistles, he denies that the *Arians* were heretics; he adds, further, that they were superior to our men in learning and eloquence. 'Tis believed, *Erasmus* did not make himself a party to that which he esteemed the ignorant and dull side of the question. In his epistles to Bilibaldus, he speaks as openly as the times would permit a wise man to speak, I (saith Erasmus) could be of the *Arian* persuasion, if the Church approved it (Nye 1687:31).⁵⁶

Nye also treated Grotius, saying he was, "Socinian all over," and that,

There is nothing in all his Annotations, which they [Socinians] do not approve and applaud.... His Annotations are a compleat [sic] system of Socinianism (Nye:32).

Other historical accounts of the rise of Antitrinitarianism, written by later Unitarian historians, seem always to begin with Erasmus. Wallace in his *Antitrinitarian Biography* remarks:

⁵³ Evidence of Erasmus's *Annotations* inspiring antitrinitarianism in Italy as well has been demonstrated by Menchi (1987:206-208).

⁵⁴ The first to employ the word altogether, however, was Henry Hedworth (1626-1705) in his *Controversy Ended* (1673) (Wilbur 1952:199).

⁵⁵ This book is sometimes wrongly attributed to John Biddle, e.g. Mansfield (305).

⁵⁶ For a fuller treatment of this see Tracy (1972:154-155).

Erasmus has given occasion, both to friends and foes, to consider him an Antitrinitarian.... That he is rightly classed by the Ministers of Poland and Transylvania, among those of the early reformers, who were instrumental 'in inculcating a knowledge of the true God and Christ,' appears from...remarks which occur in the Preface Dedicatory to his edition of Hilary. [They] certainly had their effect in smoothing the way for Antitrinitarianism...(Wallace Vol. 3:539).⁵⁷

The Unitarian scholar, J. Estlin Carpenter, in his essay "Unitarianism," written for the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, which was subsequently reprinted separately as *Unitarianism: An Historical Survey*, begins his treatment in the following terms:

The general movement of humanism at the opening of the 16th cent. led to a variety of speculations which was largely stimulated by the publication of the Greek text of the New Testament by Erasmus (1516). His omission of the famous Trinitarian verse, 1 John 5:7, and his aversion to the scholastic type of disputations, produced a marked effect on many minds (Carpenter 1922:2).

After the religious wars of the Commonwealth period, with Erasmus as their guide, these antitrinitarian sects flourished when a desire for religious tolerance was felt on all fronts. Erasmus's *philosophia Christi* experienced new life:

Here again, in the midst of the serious religious and sectarian disputes of the seventeenth century, of the political and spiritual crisis of English Puritanism, the old humanism ideal of religion reappears in all its purity and power (Cassirer 1853:34).⁵⁸

One cause of this development can be found in a press free of ecclesiastical control (Trevelyan 1932:95). Also,

the Toleration Act, though strictly limited in scope by its text, had in practice been extended to persons outside its actual provisions, like

⁵⁷ Antitrinitarian appropriation of Erasmus has been the occasion of some offense to those who view Erasmus as perfectly orthodox. But such opinions of Erasmus can sometimes result in treatments that are a bit tendentious in the exercise of saving Erasmus from such associations, e.g. Backus (1991). This issue will be briefly treated in the conclusion of the dissertation.

⁵⁸ On Richard Baxter's response to the Grotian religion, see Nuttall (1979:245-25).

Unitarians and Papists, and had created an atmosphere antipathetic to the persecution even of highly unpopular opinion. England had moved far since the days of Elizabeth, when Unitarians had been burnt at the stake (Trevelyan:95).⁵⁹

The Erasmian connection can also be traced back to just after the turmoil of the Marian reign. Queen Elizabeth ordered every parish church to have on hand copies of Erasmus's *Paraphrases*. This work represented the practical, exegetical expression of Erasmus' peaceful *philosophia Christi*. As opposed to the religious conflicts of Mary's reign, Erasmus was perceived to represent,

an appeal to primitive Christianity, as interpreted by the exact scholarship of the Renaissance and by human reason; but it also accepted in essentials, the continuing historic tradition of the Church (Trevor-Roper:42).

The Arians and Socinians were also eager to make such an appeal, but the times allowed them, if they chose, to abandon the "historic tradition of the Church."⁶⁰

Trevor-Roper has recently made more explicit the fact that above all else, it was Erasmus who at this time inspired English Socinianism, which also flowered during this springtime of new religious tolerance.⁶¹ He understands

⁵⁹ For a good treatment of the intellectual roots of this new tolerance see Cragg (1950).

⁶⁰ Pullan has suggested reasons for why Antitrinitarianism found such a foothold within Calvinist churches: "Calvinism in England and America was dogged by Unitarianism. The divorce from nature, the depreciation of outward things in the service of God, the reduced value attached to sacraments, combined to deprive the doctrines of the Atonement, of the Incarnation, of the Trinity, of their proper lines of defense, and minister after minister, congregation after congregation, abandoned the Christ of the New Testament for the idols fashioned by Arius, Socinus, and Priestley" (Pullan 1923:65). This, however, does not tell the complete story. Trevelyan has also noted that this was "a marked feature of English as distinct from Scottish Presbyterianism" (Trevelyan:99) where credalism seems to have served well in preserving the authentic sixteenth and seventeenth century traditions.

⁶¹ H. John McLachlan had earlier noted, "The influence of Erasmus of Rotterdam in this respect was most powerful. His edition of the text of the New

Socinian in the wide sense as those who use human reason in treating matters of faith. There is also the *Socinianism* "in the strict sense, which is the application of that reason to a particular article of faith, namely, the doctrine of the Trinity" (Trevor-Roper 1987:189). Erasmus is "founder of this tradition--the father of Socinianism in both the wide and narrow sense" (189).

Trevor-Roper has also highlighted the very Erasmian *Academy* of the Great Tew Circle, "a group of young men...who lived together in a kind of continuing seminar or reading party at the Oxfordshire house of Lucius Cary," before the days of the civil wars and revolution (Trevor-Roper:166). Those nourished there on Erasmus and Grotius were Sheldon, Clarendon, Hammond, Hobbs and Chillingworth, et al.:

Grotius' Annotations were eagerly read by the Great Tew circle.... Hammond would publish his own annotations in 1653. Though less radical than Grotius, he agreed substantially with him.... [He] followed the example of Erasmus and studied the whole Bible thoroughly, not as a theologian but as a humanist scholar, seeking to extract its true meaning, without presupposing divine inspiration (Trevor-Roper:222-223).

In his study treating the connection between the Cambridge Platonists and the Dutch Arminians, Colie saw Erasmus as the link between them. And, it is, in Colie's opinion, the Cambridge Platonists who paved the way for Deism:

The Cambridge Platonists surely were, as they have so often been called, the heirs of Erasmus; in their irenicism and broad theology they were, whether they liked it or not, also the forerunners of eighteenth-century deism (Colie 1957:3)⁶²

Testament and his exegetical paraphrases and Annotations helped to spread unorthodox opinions amongst Dutch Anabaptists, and later Arminians, Polish Socinians, and English Latitudinarians[,] all owed something of their free and antitrinitarian handling of the Scriptures to him" (McLachlan 1951:5).

⁶² Colie noted further this development at Cambridge: "The more humane God of Erasmus and Hooker could not help making Himself known to theologians dissatisfied with Calvin's God" (23).

Like Erasmus in search for a *via media* in the sixteenth century, the Cambridge Platonists also turned to classical antiquity for a new model that would guide them between the extremes of both Laudianism and Calvinism. For them,

A new approach was necessary and additional matter was needed to be used. So they turned naturally even to the pagan philosophers for light on the essential problem of the Christian faith. Because religion is reasonable, the 'best thoughts of the best men of all ages and faiths' cannot help but illuminate it (Cragg 1950:43).

Certainly it was their intention to use reason to *confirm* what was really essential in the Christian Religion. Because, however, "the Cambridge Platonists had in various ways helped to focus men's attention on the demands of natural theology," eventually "public opinion was ready to consider seriously the problems which the deists raised" (Cragg:139).

E. Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727)

Perhaps the most important Socinian of them all--both in the narrow sense as well as the broad sense (though properly speaking he would probably be termed an Arian) was Isaac Newton.⁶³ David Hume's adulation of Newton knew no bounds and the following quotation from Hume is typical of the reverence Newton's name was able to invoke in the minds of seventeenth/eighteenth-century British intellectuals:

In Newton this island may boast of having produced the greatest and rarest genius that ever rose for the ornament and instruction of the species (Smith 1949:52).

It is nearly impossible to over-estimate Newton's influence in the seventeenth century. Alexander Pope's *Epitaph Intended for Isaac Newton* captures

⁶³Newton will receive a fuller treatment in chapter six.

the wonderful optimism Newton occasioned: "Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in night: God said, 'Let Newton be!' and all was light" (Mossner 1936:xi).

Certainly in the world of science he has long been revered, but Newton also provided generations of Christian apologists, such as Joseph Butler, with just the kind of criteria with which to substantiate the rightness of the Christian Religion.⁶⁴ Both Richard Bentley, the first Boyle lecturer (his topic was *A Confutation of Atheism*, 1692) and Samuel Clark in his Boyle Lectures, *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God*, 1704, depended heavily on Newton's physics. On 10 December 1692 Newton wrote his first letter to Bentley on the occasion of Bentley's lectures:

When I wrote my treatise about our system, I had an eye upon such principles as might work with considering men for the belief of a Deity, and nothing can rejoice me more than to find it useful for that purpose (Alexander 1956:xv).

⁶⁴ In this regard, Mossner rightly noted, as with Butler, "The author [Newton] of the *Philosophiae naturalis principia mathematica* (1687) and with him most of the other leading scientists of the day used the latest knowledge as a bulwark to Christianity" (Mossner:32). Regarding Butler specifically, "the *Analogy* illustrates admirably the religious temper of its day.... In this he [Butler] showed his agreement with the rules of philosophizing laid down by Sir Isaac Newton" (Mossner:104). There was another side to this allegiance to the new science and appeal to natural theology, however, as witnessed to by Pattison in his contribution to *Essays and Reviews*: "There is a saying...circulating to the effect that the *Analogy* is a 'dangerous book; it raises more doubts than it solves.' All that is true in this is, that to a mind which has never nourished objections to revelation a book of evidences may be the means of first suggesting them" (Pattison:306).

Newton also provided a scientific framework for another group of apologists, however, who became so attracted to the God of Nature, they completely abandoned the God of Revelation.⁶⁵

Nevertheless, Newton has traditionally been invoked by the faithful as perhaps the greatest luminary ever to grace the Christian Religion with his allegiance. It was a surprise to learn, therefore, some years after his death, that "privately he denied the doctrine of the Trinity and the deity of Christ as both unintelligible and unscriptural" (McLachlan 1951:330). This was revealed when an unpublished MS. by Newton was discovered. It was a treatise devoted specifically to proving the spuriousness of the *comma Johanneum* and the orthodox variant at I Tim. 3:16 (the two variants we have been highlighting), titled: *An Historical Account of the Two Notable Corruptions of the Scriptures, in a Letter to a Friend* (c.1687-c.1690). Not discovered and published until 1754, almost thirty years after Newton's death (d. 1727), one biographer calls this Newton's "most important theological tract" (More 1934:632).

While he was alive there were always rumours about Newton's unorthodoxy. Even in his day, to be found denying the Trinity, while not as dangerous as in Erasmus's day, could still mean one would be deprived of a teaching post at the University. At worse, one might face imprisonment (More 1934:630). This explains why it was Newton's original purpose to have this work published anonymously, in the French language. Then, if all went well, he would also have it published in English.

Newton's thorough refutation of the authenticity of these two proof texts, "the two on which the doctrine of the Trinity is principally based"

⁶⁵ It was Voltaire's *Éléments de la Philosophie de Newton* (1741) that served to popularize Newton on the Continent (Alexander 1956:xlii), thus helping Voltaire's cause.

(More:632), coming from the very father of the new science, was nothing short of devastating to the cause of orthodoxy:

His knowledge of the Greek and Latin Fathers, the theologians of the middle ages, and the history of sacred learning, as displayed in this work, impresses the reader with amazement at the universality of his powers and attainments (Sparks 1823:230).

This work represents the capstone to the now two-hundred-year-long attempt on the part of the Antitrinitarians to shake loose from the influence of catholic tradition, by revealing the faulty textual evidence at its base. They now had the most important advocate, perhaps since Erasmus, arguing their side.⁶⁶

Erasmus had disrupted confidence in the *Vulgata Latina* by discovering its textual corruptions, thus precipitating the Protestant tradition. Analogously, the Protestant theological tradition was now shown to be based on a faulty text as well. If one could no longer have confidence in the sacred text of the *Church*, one must now look for certainty elsewhere. Newton held out the promise of *scientia*. Deism was one ultimate result. If the God of *revealed* religion could no longer be trusted, surely the God of *natural* religion could.

F. Anthony Collins (1676-1729)

Deism has been assessed as a mostly aristocratic religion, and to a large extent it was.⁶⁷ Generally, only those who were of an independent means could afford to truly speak their mind on the nature of the Christian Religion in a

⁶⁶This will be treated in more detail in a later chapter.

⁶⁷ For an excellent source treating current literature on the rise and significance of Deism see Sullivan (1982). Other recent sources are Jacob (1969), Daniel (1984), Byrne (1989), and Harrison (1990). On the life and thought of Collins, see O'Higgins (1970), and Gawlick (1965).

Deist manner, without suffering social and professional recriminations (Pattison:311-312). While it is true that "deism of a kind may be said to have been alive since thought began" (Stromberg 1954:32), Newtonianism acted as a catalyst for its emergence in a new age, agitated with doubts and criticisms about the traditional Faith. Trevelyan has noted the relationship between the Deists who stood outside mainstream culture and the Universities, where Newtonianism held sway:

It may be questioned whether the Universities were not themselves at the bottom of the trouble. Collins, Tolland and the professed deists made the noise, but did not carry the weight; more profoundly and ultimately influential was the system of exact reasoning conducted by such giants as Barrow, Newton, Locke and Bentley, and the work of the Royal Society, in place of the mere learning and oratory of the academic world before the restoration (Trevelyan:92).

At first, Newtonianism seemed to suggest a wonderful harmony between the new science and the traditional Faith. In time, it ate away at the miraculous. It soon came to provide those disillusioned with religious conflict and debate--both genuine critics and those looking for an easy route to celebrity by denouncing traditional belief--with a desire to search for a new horizon of certainty. The popular Biblical paraphrases of the Socinians and Arians, ⁶⁸ and the fresh textual data flowing from the new critical editions of the Greek New Testament--England was now the European centre for New Testament textual studies--were the components that played an important role in the equation resulting in popular Deism.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ These will be treated in chapter six.

⁶⁹ In this, the Deists "realized that they owed a more immediate debt to the Latitudinarians. Because many of their opinions clashed with the dogmas enjoined on them, these divines were habituating the church to accept diversity of belief about fundamentals. As a result, it seemed reasonable to infer that those who chose to worship as Anglicans were free to construe the church's formulas as they wished" (Sullivan 1982:227).

Much has been made of the sloppy scholarship of the Deists in presenting their case against orthodoxy. This includes the foundational principle presented by Lord Shaftesbury, claiming that orthodoxy was the result of,

The pious frauds of ancient fathers and modern clergy, and their forging, corrupting, and mangling of authors;...that they have altered and corrupted the Scriptures, as best served their own purposes and interests (Leland 1798 Vol I:95)

Regarding Nicean theology and the Trinity, Erasmus, Grotius, the Arians and Socinians would agree with the Deists that such textual corruption *had* taken place within Scripture. The textual critics, Wettstein and Bentley would concur.

Anthony Collins was one of the earliest to hold up the issue of *textual variants* in general, as one justification for abandoning the project of revealed religion altogether. Of independent means, Collins collected a vast library. At his death it numbered six-thousand, nine hundred and six volumes, including every major work published in the area of Biblical criticism since the Reformation.

This provided Collins with a great advantage: sitting atop of such scholarship, with the leisure to thoroughly engage it, he had a devastating array of data to bring to his cause of dismantling revealed religion (Drury 1989:21). Among his many works, which included those of Grotius, Hobbs, Spinoza, Simon, Le Clerc, Whiston and Locke, was the *Omnia Opera* of Erasmus, edited in 1703-6 by that "most conspicuous living Erasmian" Jean Le Clerc, (Sullivan:227).

Collins acknowledged his debt to Erasmus at the end of his famous *Discourse* by listing an "apostolic succession" of those Free-Thinkers who had influenced him, beginning with Erasmus as the progenitor:

I might in like manner have instanced in Erasmus, Father Paul [Paolo Sarpi], Joseph Scaliger, Cartesius [Descartes], Gassendus, Grotius, Hooker, Chillingworth, Lord Falkland, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, Selden, Hales, Milton, Wilkins, Marsham, Spencer, Whitchcote, Cudworth, More, Sir W.

Temple, and Locke; but that I am afraid I have been already too tedious (Collins 1713:139).⁷⁰

In exegetical matters, what Collins had to say in denouncing the prophetic element in Scripture was,

a development of that of the Arminians, Grotius, Episcopius and Leclerc. They, in fact, bear something of the relationship to Collins here, that the Latitudinarians had had towards him in his earlier writings (O'Higgins:156).⁷¹

Collins was also indebted to Erasmus and Grotius for data touching on textual variants found in their respective *Annotations*. It was to Erasmus that Collins looked for his data regarding the fact that Isaiah 7:14 could be rendered *young woman* rather than *virgin* (Collins 1741:37).

Furthermore, the early, non-confessional text critics had revealed to him that christological development could be detected in the MSS. of the Bible.

By Collins's day, however, the sheer number of the textual variants discovered seemed to disallow the possibility that the Bible was the result of the verbal dictation of God. The verbal inspiration of the Bible was, after all, the official ecclesiastical view, of both the Protestant and Roman Churches. By the eighteenth century, *scientia*, or the results of actually comparing the extant documents, had now proven this to be an impossible reality.

Certainly Collins was not the first to discover the implication textual variants had for a verbal view of inspiration. In fact, on this point, he was probably most immediately indebted to the editor of Erasmus's works, Jean Le Clerc. Le Clerc had addressed this issue in his *Five Letters Concerning the Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures* 1690:

⁷⁰ Collin's biographer tells us this "is a list of the names of men he admires and who had affected him;... These as well as his deist friends had a share in the forming of the opinion that led to the writing of the *Discourse*" (O'Higgins 1970:95-96).

⁷¹ Collins was particularly indebted to Grotius and in his *The Scheme of literal Prophecy considered*, 1726, a chapter is taken up with a defense of Grotius (O'Higgins:156-157).

They believe [the confessional theologians], first, that the sacred historians were inspired with the things themselves. And next, that they were inspired also with the terms in which they have expressed them. In a word, that the holy history was dictated word for word by the Holy Spirit, and that the authors, whose names it bears, were no other than secretaries of that spirit, who wrote exactly as it dictated (Le Clerc 1690:30).⁷²

Le Clerc, following both Erasmus and Grotius, felt that such inspiration was unnecessary for recording history. Faithful and accurate human ability would get the job done (31). Like Erasmus and Grotius, he cites problems in the narratives as evidence that these accounts are not always inspired:

It is very plain that the historians of the Scripture were not inspired by the contradictions that are found in several circumstances of their histories...a clear proof that every particular was not inspired (35).

The most devastating argument against the notion of verbal inspiration, however, are textual variants:

There is in St. Matthew, for example, more than a thousand divers readings in less than eleven hundred verses: but whereof there is not perhaps fifty, that can make any change in the sense; and that change too is but in things of little importance to Piety [an Erasmian concern]. If God had thought it necessary, for the good of His church, to inspire into the sacred historians the terms which they ought to use, he would undoubtedly have taken more care to preserve them. It is plain therefore that he designed principally to preserve the sense (39).

Now Collins demanded to know, based on the collection of variants by the text critic John Mill (1645-1707), how thirty-thousand variants could exist in a document divinely inspired by the verbal dictation of God?⁷³

Certainly Collins's was a sensationalistic challenge, but the evidence was not contrived by him, or another Deist; it was provided by a churchman, John Mill. Collins also discovered in Mill's research, an account that claimed the four

⁷²I shall go into more detail on the significance of Le Clerc's treatise on inspiration in chapter five.

⁷³ Collins certainly saw this as the paradigm he fights against, "And tho the books of the *Old and New Testament* are the immediate dictates of God himself...even the Priests of the same sect differ endlessly in opinion about their sense and meaning" (Collins 1713:45).

Gospels were subject to an official, ecclesiastical recension in the sixth century, whence our current copies were derived (Collins:72-73).⁷⁴ This is significant because by the nineteenth century, textual critics would claim just such an official revision had taken place, though much earlier, in the fourth century, thus giving the medieval Greek text its particular orthodox flavor.

Collins's final master stroke was to highlight the remarks of another churchman (who, it seems, later became an Antitrinitarian), who was still laboring under the traditional, Protestant view of Scripture, and who drew similar conclusions from Mill's thirty-thousand textual variants as did Collins himself. Collins quoted Dr. Daniel Whitby as follows:

The vast quantity of various readings collected by the Doctor [Mill] must of course make the mind doubtful or suspicious that nothing certain can be expected from books, where there are various readings in every verse, and almost in every part of every verse.... How will the papists triumph over the text of Scripture, when they see those readings.... Moreover, it does not a little hurt our cause of Protestantcy, that the Doctor confidently affirms, that not a few corruptions and interpolations have happen'd almost from the beginning of Christianity, and in the Apostolic Age (Collins:71-72).

There is a kind of poetic justice to be found in Whitby's complaint. Had not every Protestant confessionalist, from the Reformation onward, shamed Roman Catholic theologians with an Erasmian glee over the corrupt state of the *Vulgata Latina*?

⁷⁴ Here we must point out that Stromberg may not have been aware of the implications of Collins's argument, when he claims, "Textual criticism of the New Testament advanced, but the approach remained textual, and not historical.... The problem of scholarship, then [in the eighteenth century] was almost purely one of ascertaining and expounding the meaning of the text, not of discovering the origin and date of it" (Stromberg:30-31). Regarding the theologically significant textual variants we have been treating, it is evident from Erasmus forward, that there has been an interest in the source of these textual variants and the implications the history of these variants has for understanding the development of the rest of the Bible.

Collins, of course, did not go unchallenged. For all his sloppy scholarship (Pattison:307-312), his efforts earned him no less than seventy-nine responses (Ellis 1980:124).⁷⁵ The most important response, was that of Richard Bentley.

G. Richard Bentley (1662-1742)

In response to Collins, Bentley wrote under the pseudonym, *Phileleutherus Lipsiensis*, intending to leave the impression that the tract was written by a Lutheran in Germany.⁷⁶ Bentley, no friend of the old Protestant confessionalism, but a close friend of Newton, begins by castigating the churchman, Whitby, for causing all the trouble in the first place. Whitby has given expression to the old notion of the providential preservation of the Scripture. It is this doctrine Whitby sees under threat from Mill's collection of variants. This doctrine has produced a panic and alarm in Whitby, and he has, in turn, revealed this weakness to Collins (Bentley 1725:63). The answer, concludes Bentley, is to recall the old post-reformation debate surrounding the origin of the Hebrew vowel points, i.e. this was a problem once, but no one is bothered by it now.

Bentley was, however, the leading light in text critical studies in the British Isles at the time. In the name of Science, therefore, and not to mention the reputation of his colleague Mill, a response was called for.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ It should be mentioned that most of these responses probably dealt with other points in Collins's many arguments, such as the point of fulfilled prophecy. Only a trained text critic, such as Richard Bentley, could have offered a sufficient answer to Collins on textual variants.

⁷⁶ On the actual intention of his anonymity, see. Fox (1954:113).

⁷⁷ On Bentley's, and other responses to Collins, see Fox (107-115).

This response has echoed down the corridors of time and has been invoked on every occasion in the last two hundred years, when either the integrity of the text, or the practice of text criticism are maligned. With a reckless confidence in the role of brute science to now replace the Church as the final guarantor of the Biblical text Bentley offered Collins the following challenge:

Make your 30,000 [textual variants] as many more, if numbers of copies can ever reach that sum: all the better to a knowing and serious reader, who is thereby more richly furnished to select what he sees genuine.⁷⁸ But even put them into the hands of a knave or a fool: and yet with the most sinister and absurd choice, he shall not extinguish the light of any one chapter, nor so disguise Christianity, but that *every feature of it will still be the same* [emphasis mine] (Bentley:76).

It is no accident that Bentley's calming method sounds very much like Curcellaeus's preface to his Greek New Testament. Bentley mentioned Curcellaeus, with approval, two pages earlier. I am certain that it is Curcellaeus that serves as Bentley's model.

Perhaps a knave might not be able to chose a textual variant that challenges the traditional understanding of the Christian Faith, but we already know that a genius like Newton was certainly able to do just that. Nevertheless, Bentley certainly drew popular sentiment in his favor. His response saw eight editions and was republished as late as 1825 (Fox:115). The Bishop of Chichester published a thank-you tribute to Bentley's answer, which probably spoke for most of the bewildered Anglican clergy, in his *The Clergyman's Thanks to Phileleutherus For His Remarks on the Late Discourse of Free-Thinking*:

You have pulled up this panic by the very roots; and a man must be afraid of his own shadow, who can hereafter be in pain about a various reading, or

⁷⁸ Here we find echos of Curcellaeus's original plea to have all textual variants in reach so an individual reader can choose what he feels is original, a decidedly post-ecclesiastical approach to the Bible as an authoritative and sacred text.

think the number of them any prejudice to the integrity or authority of the sacred books (Hulbert-Powell 1937:305).

Bentley had another respondent that was not so euphoric about his curing of this ill. Matthew Tindal (1657-1733), perhaps the most astute of the Deists, again raised the issue of the variants. In his *Christianity as Old as Creation, or The Gospel a Republication of the Religion of Nature* (1730), he set up a dialogue between himself and a would-be orthodox, in a similar way in which Erasmus arranged his dialogue in his *Antibarbari* in response to the churchman of his day:

The manner of debating a subject dialogue-wise (as this between A. and B.) was esteem'd by the Ancients the most proper, as well as most prudent way of exposing prevailing absurdities (Tindal 1730:iv).

Writing from the opposite end of the theological spectrum, Tindal, nevertheless, raises the same points that troubled Whitby:

A.... Must not the people be at a loss when they see how differently the texts in the most momentous parts are interpreted? Dr. S. Clark has reckon'd up more than 1250 texts relating to the doctrine of the Trinity; and how few of them are interpreted alike by the contending parties.... And had we a Bible translated by *Unitarians*, many texts would be very differently translated from what they are at present; and some left out as forg'd [*e.g.* the *comma Johanneum*].... Nay, must not that uneasiness be very much increas'd by Divines, perpetually endeavouring to mend by their criticisms several capital places in the sacred writers; nay, who pretend daily to make new and momentous discoveries? How must their hearers be edify'd, when they tell them 'tis *thus* or *thus*, in such an antient *Manuscript*, *Father*, or *Assembly of Fathers*; or cry, 'tis rendered more agreeable to the mind of the *Holy Ghost* in the *Septuagint*, *Vulgar Latin*, *Syriack*, *Chaldaick*, *Ethiopick*, *Coptic*, *Gothick*, or some other *Version*?... How can we absolutely depend in things of the greatest moment, on voluminous writings, which have been so often transcrib'd by men, who never saw the original; (as none, even of the most early writers pretend they did).... And tho' there have been innumerable copies of the New Testament lost which, no doubt, had their different readings, yet as it stands at present, we are told, there are no less than 30,000 various readings.

The orthodox churchman then replies:

B. Tho' there are so many various readings, yet does not that great *critick*, Dr. *Bentley*, in his proposal for printing by subscription, a new edition of the New Testament, assure the world "that...there will be scarce 200 out of so many thousands, that can deserve the least consideration

To this Tindal scoffs,

A.... Dr. *Bentley*, certainly, ought to go on with his proposal; because the world will hardly take the Doctor's word, that in a book, where most things are own'd to be of the greatest moment, there should be so many various readings of no moment; tho' one or two may be of that consequence, as to destroy the design of the whole book.... If the doctrine of the *Trinity* is of the greatest moment, was not the Church highly concern'd to prevent various readings in that important point, as well as some forg'd texts?

In his final comments, Tindal knew he had found the critical weakness of the orthodox system: he knew the doctrine of verbal inspiration was the dominant understanding of the Christian Bible as a sacred text--30,000 various readings called this, in the mind of any reasonably disposed person, into serious question. Moreover, the very obvious corruption of texts treating the Trinity suggested it was a dogma of late development.

Bentley promised to put all right with his own recension, but in the meantime, Tindal used the Christian Bible to his own end, to reveal that even here, rightly interpreted, we discover, as Erasmus had, what really matters is conformity to correct Christian morality. Exegeting II Tim 3:16 as nearly all Antitrinitarians did since Erasmus, Tindal stressed,

And does not St. *Paul* suppose no Scripture to be divinely inspir'd, but *what is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness?* And if this be the test, ought we to admit any thing to be writ by inspiration, tho' it occurs ever so often in Scripture, till we are certain it will bear this test? (Tindal:297).

Bentley had, nevertheless, with his promise, for the moment anaesthetised the clergy of the Anglican Church from the pangs presented by textual criticism with his articulation of the ideology of harmless engagement. The dark side of this science, however, had now been glimpsed, by both the faithful, as well as by the advocates of an alternative natural religion.

H. Summary

Antitrinitarianism was at this time and would be on into the nineteenth century, a radical and destabilising force in English society, as J.C.D. Clark has made clear (Clark 1983:277-346). What we have attempted to establish in this chapter is that some of Antitrinitarianism's more important roots can be traced to sixteenth-century Erasmianism and the lower criticism he practiced.

Because of continuous controversy, as well as other reasons, Bentley himself would never complete the critical edition he had promised the world. Furthermore, the lower criticism would not find another advocate on British soil until the mid-nineteenth century (Tregelles),⁷⁹ as the centre for text critical studies shifted from Britain, to Germany.⁸⁰ I believe the extra-ecclesial quest for the historical text, begun by Erasmus, Grotius and the Socinians in Holland, was

⁷⁹I shall be treating Tregelles and his re appropriation of Bentley's ideology of harmless engagement in the final chapter of this dissertation.

⁸⁰ Bishop Christopher Wordsworth would admit later, in the nineteenth century, that, "The Rationalism and Mysticism of Germany are not exotics, but flourished in rank luxuriance many years ago on British ground.... Here is reason for self-abasement and repentance; but here is also ground for hope. A reason there is for self-abasement and repentance; for we ourselves sowed the seed, of which we are reaping the harvest. The errors now propagated among us in England are of English growth. Let us therefore acknowledge God's justice, and pray for His forgiveness. 'Remember not, Lord, our iniquities, nor the iniquities of our forefathers, neither take Thou vengeance of our sins.' Here also is ground for hope. If the theories had taken root, which were propagated in this country more than a hundred years ago, and have now been revived among us, there would be reason for alarm. But this was not the case. Those speculations at their first appearance startled and shocked the religious mind of England" (Wordsworth 1879:29-30). So it was in the eighteenth century, but not so by the latter part of the nineteenth. The Bishop's optimistic hope was never realized. This, however, is a subject worthy of its own treatment but outwith the scope of this dissertation.

aborted in Britain because of the rise of radical English Deism. In Germany, in the next century, among the non-confessional Pietists (beginning with the orthodox Bengelus in the eighteenth century and developed further by Semler, Griesbach and culminating in Strauss), the Socinian-Deistic traditions would find a greater foothold, and the quest for the historical *text*, would then become the quest for the historical *Jesus*.⁸¹ The *higher* criticism would then fully emerge from the *lower*. This would complete the process, begun in the sixteenth century, to transform the Bible from the *sacred* text of the *Church*, to the *religious* text of the *Academy*. I give the impeccable Cassirer the last word:

Erasmus, not Spinoza, is the real leader of this movement [historical criticism of the Bible]. In his critical edition of the New Testament the religious attitude and ethos of humanism found their first classic expression. Erasmus is convinced that the restoration of the pure text of the Bible would also mean the restitution of pure Christian doctrine. If we succeed in purifying this text of all later additions and arbitrary falsifications, then the image of pure Christianity in its sublime simplicity and in its original moral meaning will shine forth. The same sentiment inspires the work of his greatest pupil, Hugo Grotius. The complete plan of scientific criticism of the bible first arises in the comprehensive mind of Grotius which is nourished by all the sources of humanistic and theological scholarship, and his *Annotations* on the Old and New Testament marked out the path, even in detail, of eighteenth century research (Cassirer 1951:187).⁸²

⁸¹ J.C. O'Neill has wasted no words in getting to the point: "Nineteenth-century critics of the New Testament worked as they did because of one simple idea: the idea that Catholic Christianity was a late synthesis which more or less seriously misrepresented the historical process that produced it" (O'Neill 1985:143). The *lower* criticism provided the earliest evidence of this.

⁸² Cassirer is right to see Spinoza's contribution to Biblical criticism as secondary to that of Erasmus. Yovel has recently demonstrated Spinoza's debt, as a Portuguese Jew, to Erasmus by way of Marranism: "At the beginning of the sixteenth century.... the teachings of Erasmus gained a strong hold in Spanish monastic circles...and among certain major intellectuals, including Juan Luis Vives and Juan de Valdes. Both of these men--and a surprising proportion of other followers of Erasmus--were of Jewish origin. The movement demanded the return to the pure origins of Christianity--to the gospel of Jesus and his disciples--overcoming the corruption, institutional bureaucracy, and overemphasis on external, mechanical cult at the expense of the true heart and

inner religious awareness, with which the established Catholic Church was supposed to be affected" (Yovel 1989 Vol. 1:25). Moreover, Erasmus's christology would naturally have a greater appeal to converted Jews than would traditional Trinitarianism. Yovel argues forcefully that it was not heterodox ideas preserved from the medieval Jewish philosophers which Spinoza read, nor the personal impact of certain sceptics with whom he had socialized that was decisive for his thought; but rather, he suggests there was a prior influence at work here: "If Spinoza turned to the books and the company he did, it must be explained by a propensity for rationalist quest and religious disquiet, drawn from his psychocultural milieu and throwing the nonconformist potential of Marranism into strong relief" (29).

PART TWO

The Specific Use of Textual Variants by Eighteenth-Century Antitrinitarians

CHAPTER FIVE

Jean Le Clerc, Lower Criticism and a Shift in the Dogmatic Paradigm of Biblical Inspiration

From the discussions in which we have been engaged two conceptions of Inspiration seem to emerge, which we may call respectively the Traditional [verbal] and the Inductive or Critical.... The traditional theory needs little description. Fifty years ago it may be said to have been the common belief of Christian men, at least in this country.... [T]he Bible as a whole and in all its parts was the Word of God, and as such that it was endowed with all the perfections of that Word.... [A]ll parts of it were equally authoritative.... This was the view commonly held fifty years ago. And when it comes to be examined it is found to be substantially not very different from that which was held two centuries after the Birth of Christ.... on the inductive view, inspiration is not inherent in the Bible as such, but is present in different books and parts of books in different degrees.... If I am right in supposing that the present age will see a transition from the traditional conception to one which is more strictly accurate and scientific, that too would be only in accord with what God has willed to be the method and manner of progress in regard to many other like conceptions.

--William Sanday *Inspiration: Eight Lectures on the Early History and Origin of the Doctrine of Biblical Inspiration* (The Bampton Lectures for 1893) 3rd ed., 1903, pp. 391; 392; 393; 400; 424.

A. Biographical Background

Le Clerc was a Geneva-born Calvinist cleric who like many in the seventeenth century gave up his Calvinism for a more rational Arminianism. Reading the works of his uncle, Stephen Curcellaeus, had a decisive influence on this development (Le Clerc 1712:7) as well as his study of Grotius's *Annotationes*

(6). Having studied at Geneva, Grenoble, Saumur and Paris he was invited to leave Switzerland after publishing, at the tender age of twenty-two (under the pseudonym Liberius de St. Amore), an attack on the Trinity in his *Liberii de Sancto Amore Epistolae Theologicae* (1679).

Moving to Amsterdam there he met John Locke with whom he formed a lasting friendship and who would be his link with the English Newtonians.¹ He became Professor of Philosophy (1684) and later of Ecclesiastical History (1712) at the University of Amsterdam.

Le Clerc's Erasmianism was captured explicitly by an early autobiography, *Vita et Opera ad Annum MDCCXI* (1711), translated into English as *An Account of the Life and Writings of Mr. John Le Clerc To This Present Years MDCCXI* (London 1712) where he commented extensively on the monumental editing of a modern edition of Erasmus's works:

Mr. Le Clerc had always an affection for this Second Eye of Holland [Erasmus] (for Hugo Grotius was the other, as he used to call him) and, notwithstanding he was taken up with several important occupations, at the importunity of the bookseller, he willingly undertook this burden and brought it to conclusion. He began the work with praises of the author, which, though great, were not beyond his deserts. Erasmus, in those times, was an extraordinary genius, and, to his extreme desire of learning, and his unwearied patience in his studies, by which he did service to his contemporaries and posterity, had joined a piercing and sound judgement, a pleasant wit, a wonderful candor, and at so young an age, a singular love of truth and virtue, and an admirable eloquence. And therefore it was no wonder, if our friend [Le Clerc] was always delighted in reading him, and exhorted the young gentlemen to the same (1712:50).

One aspect of Erasmus's career that particularly caught Le Clerc's affection was Erasmus's editing of the early church fathers and his critical work on the Biblical texts, where Erasmus "with a critical penetration separated the spurious

¹Le Clerc wrote a biography of Locke in 1706.

from the genuine.... And to crown all, he translated the New Testament with annotations and paraphrases on every book" (51). As in the sixteenth century so in the eighteenth, Erasmus was seen as one who was fearless in discovering careless as well as deliberate ecclesiastical alterations of documents and so inspired in other Erasmians the like desire to get at the purest form of theological literature. It was Erasmus, Le Clerc believed, who had drawn "the Christian theology out of its primitive or clearer fountains" (52).

In Le Clerc's eyes Erasmian religion in its primitiveness was simple and non-dogmatic:

But Erasmus without neglecting mysteries and rites, by which religion becomes more decent, and human imbecility is assisted, chiefly required the fear of God, and observation of his most holy commandments, which necessarily flow from a right interpretation of mysteries and ceremonies, and which God never remits to any one... (52).

He offered a summary of his Erasmianism as found in an edition of Hugo Grotius's *de Veritate Christianae Religionis*, edited, annotated and expanded by Le Clerc in 1710:

Therefore in this book Mr. Le Clerc [Le Clerc speaks in the third person] endeavors to show...that a man ought to enter himself a member of that, which imposes nothing upon Christians, as to oblige their compliance to it, only what is assured by unquestionable memorials of Divine Revelation, to be the Doctrine of our saviour; that is, what anyone who is not void of common sense, may find in the New Testament, if he has any love for Truth; and exacts nothing of them, as necessary to salvation, but a belief therein, and a life suitable to that belief. And if all Christian societies would set their hands to this, we should soon see an end of those cruel feuds and dissensions unbecoming all who profess the Name of Christ, and the return of a desirable peace, which has for so many ages been banished from the world (1712:59).²

²On Le Clerc's role as a populizer of Grotius see de Vet (1984:160-195).

The language concerning holding only to "what is *assured by unquestionable* memorials of Divine Revelation," echoes the words of Locke in his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), published the same year as Newton's *Two Notable Corruptions* appears. Here Locke had judged that Divine Revelation must always be accorded unquestionable authority over other sources of knowledge. Nevertheless

we must be sure, that it be a divine Revelation, and that we understand it right: else we shall expose ourselves to all the extravagancy of enthusiasm, and all the error of wrong principles, if we have faith and assurance in what is not divine Revelation. And therefore in those cases, our assent can be rationally no higher than the evidence of its being a Revelation.... If the evidence of its being a revelation...be only probable proofs, our assent can reach no higher than an assurance of diffidence, arising from the more, or less apparent probability of the proofs (Locke 1975:667-668).

Locke most certainly had Newton's two Trinitarian corruptions in mind when penning this (as we will see in the next chapter). There is a sense, therefore, in which Locke's *An Essay* was an earlier and perhaps more devastating undermining of Trinitarian confessionalism than his later *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695) because the former laid the epistemological groundwork for the later. Obviously, because there was now undisputable evidence (à la Newton's important textual study) that Trinitarianism in Scripture was the result of textual interpolation reflecting later ecclesiological dogma, this doctrine could no longer be viewed as resulting from "unquestionable memorials of Divine Revelation."

Le Clerc informs us that he had read Locke's *Essay* in 1688, before it was published, and as a result was confirmed in the conclusion that

some metaphysicians abuse the Holy Scriptures, while they vainly endeavor to establish their own dreams by *some texts*.... The sum of all lies in this, that it is plain, we can never be more safe, than when we acquiesce in *Revelation* only; and pretend not to fathom the mystery of the Divine Nature, and other abstruser matters, which God has not thought fit to reveal to us, by

our metaphysical reasonings, and remoter consequences [emphasis mine](16).

Le Clerc perceived Erasmus's legacy as one of disseminating this non-Trinitarian primitivism not just to the

learned and good man...but left it in common to any one, who had occasion to make use of it.... But since there is such an inequality in mankind, that the good and the learned cannot come in competition with the multitude of the wicked and illiterate, this excellent man on consequence raised the whole posse of the latter against him (53).

Le Clerc's invitation to leave Switzerland for his heretical views concerning the Trinity must have made him feel he was reliving Erasmus's plight. Le Clerc was quite explicit on this point:

[I]n our own time there are *Robortelli*, who practice the same against those, who have deserved well of learning; which our friend [Le Clerc] has sufficiently experienced, though much inferior to Erasmus. If anyone views the histories of mankind, with an ordinary attention, or only that which belongs to the condition of learned men and learning, he will easily observe, that in the theater, there were persons very instrumental for the good of the Republic of letters; there were likewise several who endeavoured to obscure and detract from their merit. The same persons are now, and such there will be for ever (56).

To reach these masses Erasmus's design was to popularize Scripture and so he was careful to cause no offence at this level:

In his version of the New Testament, in his Annotations and Paraphrases he took care to give no offence to any, but on the contrary to serve all, for which he has deserved the praise and thanks of all posterity, which the learned of all nations have and will give him, while value shall be paid to holy letters, and good intention (53).

Le Clerc, following in Erasmus's path, worked equally hard to popularize Erasmianism in his own age by similar means:

In these times, while Mr. Le Clerc was wholly taken up in translating and illustrating *the Historical Books of the Old Testament*, or in writing his *Bibliothèque Choisie*, [he] did [not] so much as stir out of Amsterdam.... (57).

Colie, in her masterful study treating the influence of the Dutch Arminians on the Cambridge Platonists, sees Le Clerc as something less than a first rate intellect: "Le Clerc was no Bayle. Neither his intellect nor his style was the equal of his countryman" (Colie 1957:34). But the advantage that Le Clerc had over a Bayle was a knowledge of English.³ His contacts with Locke and Gilbert Burnet and others meant that he had the most favourable of channels through which to affect the English Enlightenment. Moreover, like Erasmus, he had a passion for taking the Erasmian ideals, "in defence of liberty and toleration, of reasonableness and consideration in human life" (Colie:34), to the reading masses. Though I think Colie's judgement to be too harsh she has rightly captured his significance:

Le Clerc was an eighteenth-century man of letters, a publicist, eternally active, universal--and in consequence often superficial. Activity, universality, superficiality: these are essential qualities for the transmission of ideas, and Le Clerc was a master in that art (Colie:31).

Le Clerc was the first to publish Locke, whose essay, "*Méthode Nouvelle de dresser des Recueils*," appeared in Le Clerc's *Bibliothèque Historique et Universelle* in 1686 (Colie:31).⁴ Hence, not only was Le Clerc a significant source of continental ideas into the British Isles, but "His periodicals were a principal agent of transmission of English ideas...to the continent at the turn of the century" (Colie:32). Therefore, when Newton sent his MSS treating the two notable Trinitarian corruptions to Le Clerc, by way of Locke, he was exposing

³Actually Bayle had no liking for Le Clerc, accusing him in a letter of sowing "a thousand seeds of atheism in people's minds" (Woodbridge 1988:66).

⁴For an interesting analysis of the significance of this essay see Kroll (1986:3-9).

his research and the conclusions to which it pointed to a significant audience within the seventeenth century republic of letters.

B. Le Clerc and the Erasmian/Grotian View of Inspiration

Le Clerc understood Erasmus's view of inspiration, taking seriously the human element, and therefore the defects both of the translator(s) of the *Vulgata* as well as the human authors of Scripture themselves. In his paraphrase of 2 Tim 3:16 Erasmus rendered *πᾶσα γραφὴ θεόπνευστος καὶ ὠφέλιμος* as "All Scripture given by inspiration of God, is profitable," and so does Grotius hint with reference to the Syriac in his *Annotationum*, rather than "all Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable" (Erasmus 1549; Grotius 1646). Hence, some of Scripture might be inspired while other portions may not, which could account for errors, etc..

It was Locke who returning Le Clerc's favour, translated from two much larger works, *Sentimens de quelques Théologiens de Hollande sur l' Histoire Critique du vieux Testament* (1685) and *Défense des Sentimens* (1686) what in English became Le Clerc's *Five Letters Concerning the Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures* (1690).⁵

Locke had earlier expressed his own doubts about inspiration to his Dutch friend, Limborch, in a letter, in 1685:

If everything in the holy Scriptures is to be indiscriminately accepted by us as divinely inspired, a great deal of opportunity will be given to philosophers for doubting our faith and sincerity. If on the other hand, any

⁵Golden seems not to have known that the letters were taken both from Le Clerc's *Sentimens* as well as from his *Défense* (even though this is made abundantly clear in the *Advertisement by the Translator to the Reader* found at the beginning of the *Five Letters*) and the latter does not appear in Golden's bibliography. Moreover, he does not seem to be aware that Locke was the translator of the *Five Letters* (Golden: 134-135).

part is regarded as of merely human composition, what becomes of the divine authority of the Scriptures, without which the Christian religion falls to the ground (Cranston 1957:255).

Locke must surely have felt that Le Clerc's treatment was a sufficient resolution of this dilemma.

The two above treatises were critical assessments of Richard Simon's *Histoire Critique du Vieux Testament* (1680).⁶ Le Clerc and Simon had originally fallen out over a proposal that Simon published pseudonymously regarding a polyglot Bible (*Novorum Bibliorum polyglotorum synopsis* 1684). He asked other scholars for their suggestions for such a project and when Le Clerc submitted his Simon rejected the younger scholar out of hand (Woodbridge 1988:70).

Locke, in his introduction to these *Five Letters Concerning the Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures*, published the same year as Newton's *Two Notable Corruptions* and his own *An Essay*, says that he did not wish to take sides in the disputes between Simon and Le Clerc but wanted what Le Clerc had to say on inspiration to be well known because

though on the one side he sufficiently overthrougths the pretended necessity of oral tradition [Simon's thesis]...on the other side, [he] ingenuously acknowledges all the difficulties that are amongst the learned about the text of the Scriptures.... [He] propounds a middle way, which he conceives proper to settle in men's minds a just esteem of the Scriptures, upon a solid foundation (Le Clerc 1690:4-5).

Locke argues that Le Clerc wants to answer the objections "which the Deists and Atheists have used to make against the stile of Holy Scripture" (9) and claims that Le Clerc is espousing the views of Mr. N. on the subject. [Mr.

⁶On the debate between Le Clerc and Simon see Sole (1985), Woodbridge (1988) and Reventlow (1988).

N. may be Isaac Newton but I have yet to confirm this].⁷ In short, the sceptics can no longer be answered by a brute appeal to authority. The Newtonian approach must now be implemented:

The doctrine of implicit faith has lost its vogue. Every man will judge for himself, in matters that concern himself so nearly as these do. And nothing is now admitted for truth, that is not built upon the foundation of solid reason (7).

But to do this Le Clerc had to also distance himself from the received doctrine of verbal inspiration as maintained by the dogmatic traditions of both Roman as well as Protestant catholics. This, Locke anticipates, will scandalize "the simple-hearted pious," but the treatise is not intended for them in any case, but for those "more curious and less religious" (8).

First, the history recorded in Scripture can be trusted not because the historians were necessarily inspired, but because the authors were sincere and careful. In fact, it is "groundless and useless" to believe the historians were either "inspired in the things themselves," or "were inspired also with the terms in which they expressed them" (30). It is the classic doctrine of verbal inspiration that Le Clerc disparages, arguing against

[i]n a word, that the holy history was dictated word for word by the Holy Spirit, and that the authors, whose names it bears, were no other than secretaries of that spirit, who wrote exactly as it dictated.... I affirm that it is false, that we cannot be perfectly certain of the main substance of a history unless we suppose it inspired.... In the second place, this opinion supposes without necessity a miracle, of which the Scripture it self says nothing (30-31).

⁷For a general treatment of Newton's views on Biblical historical narrative, see Manuel (1974:83-104).

One of the reasons Le Clerc is certain that the Scriptures were not verbally inspired is because, like Erasmus, he saw clear errors made by the penmen who were anything but infallible:

It is very plain that the historians of the Scripture were not inspired by the contradictions that are found in several circumstances of their histories. The Evangelists agree perfectly among themselves in what concerns the main of the history of Jesus Christ, but there are some circumstances wherein they disagree, a clear proof that every particular was not inspired (35).

Examples are then cited.

Then, again like Erasmus, he calls forth this same opinion as it is found in the early fathers, such as Chrysostom, for whom such errors were a witness to the providence of God, allowing us to see that the historical narratives within Scripture are genuine and not contrived with perfect agreement.⁸

It is the sense that has been preserved by providence, not the words. This is clear from textual variants alone, where providence has allowed "men to put in synonymous words one for another; and not hindered the slipping in of a great many varieties, little considerable as to the sense, but remarkable as to words and order" (39). Here text criticism has provided Le Clerc with tangible proof that verbal inspiration cannot be maintained when forced to account for all the data. Surprisingly at this point, Le Clerc chose not to raise the issue of Trinitarian corruptions within the orthodox texts, perhaps from a fear of his arguments being dismissed as coming from a sceptic.

In summary:

If God had thought it necessary, for the good of his Church, to inspire into the sacred historians the terms which they ought to use, he would undoubtedly have taken more care to preserve them. It is plain therefore that he designed principally to preserve the sense. Thus neither the words, nor

⁸He cites Grotius's opinion on this point.

the things, have been inspired into those who have given us the sacred history; although in the main that history is very true in the principal facts (39).

C. Responses to LeClerc

To what extent Le Clerc's treatise was influential may be judge from the formal responses he received. William Lowth's, *Vindication of the Divine Authority of the Old and New Testaments* (1692), which earned him the chaplaincy to the Bishop of Winchester and a prebendary stall in that cathedral, was the first in English.

This reply was a particularly nasty attack, intending to answer those assaulting religion "by a rude and ignorant profaneness, by a confident pretence to reason, and by sceptical sophistry" (*Dedicatory*, no pagination). Moreover, these "enemies of God and goodness" attack religion, until its "mysteries are ridiculed by heretics, as if they intended to invite atheists to their assistance, to join a helping hand to the carrying on [of] so good a work, as the exposing [of] religion, and making it appear absurd and contemptible" (*ibid.*). And here we have an example of one of those Locke had anticipated would be "scandalized" at Le Clerc's honest assessment.

Lowth has completely misrepresented Le Clerc's motive but accurately understood the implications of his arguments: The Bible will with such arguments lose its status as a *sacred* text:

My Lord, the Design of the Letters which I have undertaken to answer, is to perplex men's minds with difficulties about the *nature of inspiration*, and thereby render the divine authority of those writings suspected, which the Church has always look upon as the sacred *Deposit* of divine truth, which God has committed to its trust, and designed for its guide and oracle (*ibid.*).

By his second edition of this work Lowth spends two hundred and fifty-eight pages and never answers Le Clerc's objection regarding textual variants. He spends all of his time asserting with circular arguments that Scripture claims to

be inspired; the Church has always recognized its inspiration--therefore, Scripture is inspired: "The Scripture must be divinely inspired to make it the foundation for a divine faith" (250). "Both the matter itself, and the authority of the writers, prove the inspiration of the Prophetical writings" (251). He then insists, without even acknowledging Le Clerc's evidences to the contrary, that "the use of inspiration is chiefly to supply the defects, and prevent the mistakes to which the holy writers were naturally liable" (250). He does give ground from the received position, however, in qualifying inspiration in several ways: 1) "From hence it follows that there are *different degrees of inspiration in the holy writings, according as the nature of the things which are treated of is more or less adequate to the natural faculties of the writers*" and that "there is no reason to think that the Spirit did ordinarily *dictate* the very words and phrases to any of the inspired writers" (emphasis mine)(251). In short, inspiration is no longer a specific providing and ordering of words, as it was to most of the Protestant scholastics, but rather, we now have only to acknowledge that Scripture was "writ with such a degree of divine assistance, as is sufficient to make an unerring rule and guide to believers" (253).

Such would be the kind of adjustment which most ecclesiastical divines--but for those high churchmen and Puritans most self-consciously attached to the scholastic dogmatic tradition--would now be making with the advancement of text-critical data and the application of such data to the dogma of verbal inspiration and the Trinity. This is a major factor which has received little

attention in addressing "the transformation of Anglicanism" in the seventeenth century.⁹

Two other works addressing Le Clerc's treatise were C.G. Lamothe's *The Inspiration of the New Testament* (1694) and John Williams's Boyle lectures, *The Possibility, Expediency and Necessity of Divine Revelation* (1708). Lamothe was a French lawyer educated at the University of Orleans who fled France for London after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. In the mean time he had abandoned the practice of Law for the ministry among the Congregationalists. While a pastor in London he soon entered the dialogue with the antitrinitarians, publishing his, *Two Discourses Relating to the Divinity of our Saviour* (1693).

Lamothe challenges Le Clerc's opinion that orthodox churchmen held to verbal dictation by citing several prominent Protestant theologians to the contrary (Rivet, Witsius, and Cappelus), and asserts rather that "the common belief of Protestant Divines is, that the Apostles made use of their reason, their memory, and a language which favoured much of their education and their natural genius" (Lamothe 1694:101). According to Lamothe, the confusion has entered when Protestant divines employed the metaphorical language of the early church fathers, which lends itself to a dictation theory, when all that is really intended is to assert that the Holy Spirit was involved in all aspects of the process in recording divine Revelation ("under the immediate direction of the Holy Ghost") (102).

When we come to Lamothe's own position, we discover that not only were the apostles inspired when given Revelation, but they were also guided by the

⁹I allude to J.W. Packer's important work, *The Transformation of Anglicanism 1643-1660 With Special Reference to Henry Hammond* (1969).

Holy Ghost in the recording of this inspired content. This in contrast to Le Clerc and those who reduce "all religion to reason purely natural" (107), who Lamothe believes will agree to the former proposition while disallowing the latter because they

know well that the number of these revelations is not considerable. And should we oppose against them any one that annoyed them never so little, they would from the infirmities of the Apostles derive an argument which should bring their Revelations to the trial (107).

While coming short at this point of acknowledging that the very words of the Apostles were inspired he does affirm that there "was then in the written Revelations which they left us, two sorts of inspiration: inspiration of suggestion, and inspiration of direction" (109), which direction rendered them "infallible in their writings" (ibid.).¹⁰ Moreover, there are times when the Holy Ghost gives the very words, by suggestion, or even dictation, to the Apostles, but on other occasions, such as when they express doubt--even while under the guidance of the Holy Ghost--that they do so on their own (118-120). Finally, Lamothe does grasp the nettle and clearly states that even under mere direction from the Holy Ghost, "there is no room for the distinction which is usually made between words and things" (120), because

The words and the things depend upon one and the same sort of inspiration: both the one and the other proceed from the same spring, and are guided by the same hand: they proceed equally from human faculties, and are equally directed by the same Spirit of God (120).

¹⁰He maintains clearly that the Holy Ghost "presided in the choice of the matter which was to be put into the work, not suffering the Apostles to write any thing but what was true, and to the purpose. This is the inspiration of direction: nor does there need any more to be said, as to the *Truths* which they had *heard* and *seen*" (112).

Moreover, to allow that "there is no exactness in the terms" and to disbelieve that thought must be confined "to the meaning of the words" is "a wonderful rampart for all manner of heretics" (159). Furthermore,

We make a diligent search after the true meaning of the terms which they [the Apostles] make use of. And when we have found out their true and genuine sence, we submit to their decision, as if the Holy Ghost had spoken to us (161).

While Lamothe has steadfastly repudiated the model of dictation, he has, nevertheless, by means of his direction of the Holy Ghost, arrived at the same results as dictation, namely, every word was the result of the Holy Ghost, the doctrine Le Clerc wishes to expose to scorn.

Having affirmed the classic Protestant orthodox understanding of inspiration in its verbal dimension, he, nevertheless, does so without ever addressing Le Clerc's challenge from the textual variants.

Lamothe treats specifically Erasmus's contribution to the debate regarding the latter's assertion--based also on Jerome's precedent--that the Apostles did at times have a lapse of memory. Lamothe's reply to this is rather weak, however, attempting to release Erasmus with the argument that Erasmus was merely repeating the opinion of others and not perhaps his own, which argument Erasmus himself had used in response to his own critics, but was no more convincing in that context than in the present (146-147).

Interesting here is the fact that Lamothe knows of the argument that perhaps the errors in the text crept in during scribal transmission and were therefore never part of the original text. He dismisses this argument, however, asserting, "But there is no need of bringing this answer. Providence hath guarded the Holy Scripture, so that after a slight examination, scruples vanish" (149-150). Nevertheless, he equivocates a bit on the next to the last page of his treatise when he finally takes in hand to address Le Clerc's objection of textual

alteration of the originally inspired material. Lamothe's only reply is to poo-poo the issue. He allows that some of the words that Jesus Himself spoke, though inspired at the time, have not been preserved, since not everything he said has been recorded. Moreover, it

evidently appears, that what is objected in reference to the variety of readings, no way prejudices the first inspiration of the Sacred Writings. Nor can we find how they should be prejudiced in the least by saying, that God permitted the words the Apostles made use of under the direction of the Holy Ghost, in process of time to suffer some slight alteration, through the presumption or carelessness of the transcribers (178-179).

But while he has now taken back his claim that there is no need "of bringing this answer" [of scribal corruption] because "Providence hath guarded the Holy Scripture, so that after a slight examination, scruples vanish," he never addresses the implication of his admission that "in the process of time...some slight alteration, through the presumption or carelessness of the transcribers" would seem to negate both original inspiration as well as Providential protection. I suspect that the answer lies in his minimising the significance of the alterations, reducing them exclusively to "some slight alteration" and ignoring the possible doctrinal significance of such alterations. But this in no way answers his critic's objection on this score.

John Williams had a go at Le Clerc in his Boyle Lectures of 1708. He was Bishop of Chichester and a vigorous polemicist, attacking both dissenters as well as Roman Catholics. While wanting to maintain clearly the divine nature of the Holy Scriptures, when treating textual variants he suddenly wants to appeal to the analogy of all literature alike, as one class, in dismissing the problem obviously presented by variants:

The issue of all this is, that if this will invalidate the Truth of Scripture, it will also invalidate that of all writings whatsoever.... 'Tis but reasonable then that we should give the same quarter to the Scripture, that we allow to other writings (128).

But then Williams has not been arguing that Scripture is *like* other writings, but rather that it is *inspired* and therefore *different* from other writings in an essential way. Moreover, he plainly allows for textual variants, in spite of the inspiredness of the document, because this will allow him to explain that which is of more concern to him, namely, errors and inconsistencies in the account:

[A]nd if there should be found in his book [Joshua] any literal errors, one name put for another, or a different reading of the same names, we cannot in reason judge it to be an oversight of so sufficient and so careful a writer, but that it might proceed from some one that transcribed it after the Αὐτὸγρᾶφον, or original copy, in some successive generations, and which in reason 'tis impossible wholly to prevent (131).

Unlike so many other confessional churchmen, Williams does not want to invoke Providence on this issue: "'Tis not here necessary for me to enter upon a debate, how far the Providence of God doth herein concern itself in preserving the text free from all corruptions" (132); rather he wants to treat this issue "humanly speaking, and of the truth of it separately from its Divine authority." Here he has come very close to Le Clerc because if he allows that during the transmission certain errors could come in, as with all other books, why could they not have been original, as with all other books. His answer is in fact Le Clerc's: the Biblical authors were careful historians (132). Nevertheless, even admitting these variants, it will always be "a thing of no moment" either "omitted or inserted, exchanged or altered." Such variants never concern "a disease in the vitals, that affects the heart or the brain." Certainly this was not the perspective of most of the Newtonians.

Summary

Le Clerc was a pre-eminent Erasmian. As editor of Erasmus's collected works he must surely have seen himself in a similar role to that of Erasmus in his day. Le Clerc tackled the sensitive issue of verbal inspiration and used the

evidence of the lower criticism to drive home his point with some force. He argued that such a view was not only untenable, but those who continued to hold to it could do so only by an intolerant resistance to the very evidence that would compel them to accept those who no longer dwelt within citadel of the old orthodoxy. Le Clerc made explicit what nearly all Enlightenment Newtonians believed and the lower critical data played a major role in producing the paradigm shift for them from a verbal to a more limited or modified view of inspiration.

CHAPTER SIX

Lower Criticism and Dogma Among the Newtonians: A Crisis for Orthodoxy and a Plea for Religious Tolerance

Whereas the Trinitarian Doctrine is founded upon obscure or mistaken Texts.... it is unjust and unchristian, to lay the Unitarians or Socinians under Penal Laws or other Hardships, on the account of their Conscience and Doctrine. For we may see here, that an honest and sincere Man may in the Pursuit of his own Salvation, and in adhering to Protestant Principles of the Clearness and Sufficiency of Scripture in Fundamentals, as also in reverence of the ancient Faith held forth in the Apostolic Creed, and of the Church of the first Ages, he may (I say) with clear Satisfaction in his own Conscience, disbelieve the Trinitarian Doctrine. But how can Christians with Satisfaction to their Consciences punish such a Man?

--Stephen Nye, *A Brief History of the Unitarians, Called also Socinians* 1687, pp.168; 172.

A. Newton's Text Criticism: *Two Notable Corruptions*

By the latter half of the seventeenth century in Britain, textual variants within the Greek New Testament were beginning to be perceived as a serious threat to establishment Protestantism.¹ Chillingworth had said "THE BIBLE, I

¹ Hulbert-Powell captured the mood: "The suspicion aroused in England [with the publishing of Mill's New Testament] was very similar to that which disturbed the orthodox Christians in Basel in 1730, greatly to Wettstein's discomfiture. In England, as later in Switzerland, many Fundamentalists feared that the vast number of variants found in different MSS., and the use which scholars would make of them, would endanger the authority of the pure Word of God" (1937: 302-303). Hulbert-Powell's anachronistic use of the word "Fundamentalists" is unfortunate and unhelpful. As he himself had admitted earlier in this same work: "Holy Scripture was considered in the period *circa* 1600 to 1750 as identical, even to its *minutiae*, with the Word of God. The critic of the text was suspect, and was subject to persecution and misrepresentation" (1). As we have demonstrated thus far this attitude tended to be the majority position for confessing churchmen and not just a hardened

say, the BIBLE only, is the religion of Protestantism" (Chillingworth 1638:56), but Richard Simon argued in his *Histoire critique du Texte du Nouveau Testament* (Simon 1689:), that the Bible's many *variants* demanded ecclesiastical authority to sort it all out; while Anthony Collins would argue in his *A Discourse of Freethinking* (1713), that the variants meant the very demise of *revealed* religion altogether and so invited the arrival of the age of *natural* religion.

Between these two options of extreme conservatism and the radical notion that supernatural Christianity had run its course, was a group of Enlightenment, mostly non-Trinitarian Christians, who argued that the textual variants merely meant that some adjustment was in order. Taking their inspiration from Erasmus's primitive, restorationist Christianity, John Locke, Richard Bentley, Samuel Clarke, Jean Le Clerc and William Whiston, shared in a common nurturing from Sir Isaac Newton's *Principia* (1687).²

obscurantism of a few malcontents, as Hulbert-Powell's use of "Fundamentalists" might suggest.

² I demonstrated in a previous chapter the influence of Erasmus and Grotius on the Latitudinarians. Nevertheless, at times it becomes a challenge to demonstrate conclusively the influence of Erasmus on an individual's thought. As M.A. Screech discovered: "As a young man I was struck by the frequency with which I came across not merely ideas derived from Erasmus but his very words and phrases in the writings of English or Continental authors who never mention him by name. The matter puzzled me and I looked for solutions. None were immediately forthcoming, except for those English authors.... Erasmus remained available and could be read at will" (Screech 1990:343). This in contrast to those countries where the Tridentine *Index librorum prohibitorum* was in force. Erasmus became the archetypal representative of tolerant simplicity in religious matters during the Enlightenment and so his influence in circles where such values were highly praised would be nearly impossible to always demonstrate, while nevertheless being a factor; just as the direct or indirect influence of Freud, Darwin or Einstein would be difficult to demonstrate in the

1. Newton's Religion

Jacob rightly assessed the state of English Christianity after the revolution in her important *The Newtonians and the English Revolution 1689-1720* (1990):

The Revolution demanded from churchmen a redefinition of the role of providence in political affairs, and it also required a reinterpretation of the church's mission. In consequence of the Toleration Act and the new authority accorded to Parliament, only a broad natural theology, anchored on sound natural philosophy, could enable the church to propose an acceptable Protestantism suited to an open society wherein rival religious, political, and social groups vied for their share of profits and preferment and therefore for their own power and self-interest.... The latitudinarians realized that their natural religion, if properly articulated, could forge among Protestants a consensus upon which the church's moral leadership would rest secure (Jacob 1976:143-144).

Once before, such a political settlement signalled an advance in the development of religious toleration and the blunting of dogmatic distinctives which would tend toward a more Erasmian consensus on religion, just after the Thirty-Years War. With the signing of the *Instrumentum Pacis* in 1648

the problem of divided Christianity was in principle given a political solution. As no union could any longer be hoped for from the confessions, in future political agreements had to be made which left out any theological problems inherent in them.... Faith was something which could not be conceived of without certainty. But where was this certainty, if two churches which appealed to the same Lord, the same holy scripture, the same early Christian tradition, were making fundamentally different statements about the way to salvation? (Scholder 1990:10-11).

The Newtonians of the seventeenth century had a vision for producing a new consensus which bore all the hallmarks of Erasmus's earlier aspirations.

thought of a modern today who would largely assume the paradigmatic significance of these thinkers.

Now that confessions were being seriously marginalized as a means of attaining consensus, Newtonian religion would quickly come to fill the vacuum.

Isaac Newton's contribution to the early development of the dogmatic implications of certain theologically significant textual variants has been all but completely missed; or worse yet, ignored by those who have treated the history of New Testament text criticism. A survey of modern manuals treating N.T. text criticism reveals virtually no knowledge of Newton's work (Vaganay 1991; Vaganay 1937; Aland and Aland 1989; Metzger 1964; Greenlee 1967; Bruce 1950; Souter 1935; Souter 1965; Taylor 1961; Lake 1959; Robertson 1925; Gregory 1907; Vincent 1903; Nestle 1901; Kenyon 1912; Kenyon 1953; Kenyon 1958).³ Moreover, after Tregelles's treatment of Newton in the former's contribution to Horne's *Introduction* (1869:359-360; 376; 385-386) and Samuel Davidson's earlier brief treatment (1839:141-142; 156) even the nineteenth-century manuals then become silent regarding Newton (Scrivener 1861; Scrivener 1883; Scrivener 1894; Hammond 1880; Warfield 1890; Schaff 1894; Kenyon 1895).⁴

What is all the more interesting is that two monographs intended to be close studies of text critical development in the period in which Newton worked

³ To Metzger's credit, bibliographer *par excellence*, he alone has at least noted Newton's treatise in a footnote in the second edition of his *Introduction* (1968:270), but offers no judgement as to its significance and seems not to know that it was addressed originally to John Locke.

⁴ Tregelles, however, made no mention of Newton in his earlier and rather comprehensive *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament* (1854). Surprising is Conybeare's (1910) omission since his intention was to show the theological significance of textual variants within the history of the discipline.

seem not to even be aware of his contribution (Hulbert-Powell 1937; Fox 1954).⁵

It will be the burden of this chapter to demonstrate that Newton's reputation as the supreme scientific mind in eighteenth-century England, played a decisive role in the English Enlightenment in carrying his textual research to all who were either interested in establishing the most historically accurate edition possible of the Greek New Testament for apologetic purposes (Bentley); or who were actively involved in the Trinitarian debates of the day (the Antitrinitarian Newtonians).

Kroll has addressed how a gradually emerging scepticism about the state of the N.T. text in the seventeenth century would eventually result in the development of the science of palaeography. And it was palaeography that established

once and for all the impossibility of recuperating the past as a seamless text, and signals a new historical consciousness which recognizes both the necessity and discreteness of particular materials or evidences, which includes indiscriminately a study of the "sacred" and "secular" past, and which only derives coherence from the mind of a critic, or narrative of an historian (Kroll 1986:13).

Newton's turning his attention to the theological significance of various Greek N.T. MS sources and versions in order to prove that some had been

⁵There can be no excuse for Hulbert-Powell because his subject, J.J. Wettstein, was responsible for the publishing of Newton's important text critical treatise in London in 1754. I believe that had he spent as much effort in explicating the final and fuller form of Wettstein's *Prolegomena* (1751), (which was more important being his final judgement on the subject), he would have discovered Wettstein's account of the discovery of Newton's very important treatise (1751:185). Nor does the author list the 1754 edition of Newton's work (which probably contained Wettstein's edited additions) in the list of Wettstein's works which I would take to mean that Hulbert-Powell simply did not know of this aspect of Wettstein's activities.

doctrinally altered, played no small role in stimulating the scientific study of the Biblical text.

Regarding the eighteenth-century debates concerning the Trinity, Colligan rightly assessed Locke and Newton as the two most important contributors to the antitrinitarian cause, both of whom used the very means resorted to by the apologists of orthodoxy, namely, reason (Butler, Reid and Paley) and text criticism (Bentley). Locke and Newton provided a dual threat to the orthodox status quo, "Locke from the philosophical side, where the relationship between Revelation and Reason is defined," and "from the textual side...the case of Sir Isaac Newton, where two material texts for the doctrine of the Trinity were critically examined" (Colligan 1913:19).

It is my argument that orthodox churchmen as well as non-Trinitarians felt the paradigmatic significance of Newton's argument that dogmatic development, supporting Trinitarianism, rested on late, theologically motivated textual interpolation. Both groups came to see that adjustment was now absolutely necessary. For the orthodox it would be a fresh exegetical reentrenchment, basing a defense of the Trinity on other proof texts, less explicit than the two traditionally used which were now called into question by Newton's research; or else on other arguments altogether (such as the somewhat controversial "Granville Sharp Rule" of grammar)⁶. For non-Trinitarians Newton's study

⁶This topic is worth its own independent treatment and was meant to be part of this study but contriants prevailed against this. With the loss of these two classic proof-texts what remained in support of the Trinity and the deity of Christ had to serve double-duty and so took on even greater significance. And since such passages that remained were not in dispute textually, but grammatically (e.g. Rom. 9:5), Granville Sharp, a Victorian Evangelical created a rule of grammar for assuring that such passages would always have a reference to Christ's deity. See his *Remarks on the Uses of the Definitive Article in the Greek Text of the New Testament* (1798, 2nd ed, 1802; 3rd ed. 1803). Also see C. Winstanley *A Vindication of Certain Passages in the Common English Version of the*

provided a new opportunity to call for a changed attitude of tolerance on behalf of those non-conformists who shared Newton's conviction that the established Church, and her Trinitarian orthodoxy, were seriously undermined by Newton's discovery of *Two Notable Corruptions* which had made their way illegitimately into the text of the Greek as well as the Latin New Testaments.

It really is not too surprising that the importance of Newton's work has been missed by recent scholarship--some of Newton's information and arguments are now dated, or less than fully accurate, though this in no way negates the enduring evidence which proves his case to have been, nevertheless, accurate. The real reason, however, lies elsewhere.

The entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography* shows a complete lack of understanding of Newton's genuine antitrinitarian views and so also seriously misses the significance of his textual study. In so doing the author of this entry also missed Newton's own motivation in producing his textual study. In this instance the author reflects rather typically a later, modern position of adjustment which tends to down play the significance of the two variants Newton challenged. The one scholar who has done the most to explicate Newton's theological views and cast Newton's textual work in its true context, H. John McLachlan, put this erroneous judgement in its proper light:

Such an observation indicates that the writer [of the *DNB* article] hardly realized the decisive part played by biblical proof-texts in the construction of

New Testament (1905), and G. Blunt, *Six More Letters to G. Sharp on His Remarks Upon the Uses of the Article in the Greek Testament* (1803), and finally, G. Sharp, *A Dissertation on the Supreme Divine Dignity of the Messiah: In Reply to a Tract Entitled, "A Vindication of Certain Passages in the Common English Version of the New Testament* (1806). On Sharp's life see P. Hoare, *Memoirs of Grandville Sharp Composed from His own Manuscripts* (1820).

Protestant doctrinal systems from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. Beza once said it was the foul work of the devil to deprive Christians of the word "God" in I Timothy iii. 16, as "There is scarcely another passage in which all the mysteries of our redemption are explained so magnificently or so clearly" (McLachlan 1941:164).⁷

So valuable had Newton's reputation been for those in the eighteenth century who looked to him for a scientific validation of the truth of Christianity against Deistic and Humean scepticism that few outside of an inner circle of Newton's friend's either knew or were willing to admit his radically unorthodox christology. That most of the orthodox viewed Newton, and sometime Locke, as the greatest allies of the traditional faith, while non-Trinitarians rightly viewed them as the most important pioneers of a restored, primitive Christianity could not be more clearly seen than in the two following and contrasting assessments. First, the orthodox view (expressed by a Unitarian, however):

In an age when old opinions were fearlessly cast aside, and the freest stimulus was given to the pursuit of truth...its two greatest philosophers--the one leading on the van of moral science, the other conducting discovery with unexampled triumphs through the physical creation--stood firmly and devotedly by the religion of Jesus Christ: not simply paying it the respectful homage due to a venerable and beneficent belief, but subjecting its history and documents to a thoughtful scrutiny, and consecrating their high powers to its illustration and defense (Tayler 1845:361-362).

The Unitarians generally had quite a different view. For them Locke and Newton were,

A solvent to the harsh Calvinism of those times, with its rigorous views of Justification and Atonement, a corrective to irrational and intolerant dogmatism, a standing criticism of the Athanasian and scholastic dogma of the Trinity, this stream of Socinian ideas from abroad was to merge with native English protests against the prevailing orthodoxy and at length bear

⁷ This passage in Beza will be treated later in the chapter when addressing the paraphrases and annotations

fruit in the rational Christianity of a John Locke and an Isaac Newton, and in the Unitarianism of a Joseph Priestley (McLachlan 1951:144).⁸

For years after Newton's death the orthodox made every effort to keep him within the confines of orthodoxy, even after the publication of his treatise on the textual corruptions. E. Henderson attempted to reply to an 1830 edition of Newton's treatise published by Socinians, who had publicised its sale by announcing from their depository in St. Paul's Churchyard: "Sir Isaac Newton on Trinitarian Corruptions." This sale of Newton's work prompted Henderson in his *The Great Mystery of Godliness Incontrovertible, or Sir Isaac Newton and the Socinians* (1830), to reaffirm Newton's orthodoxy while refuting his conclusions on these very sensitive variants. Henderson was greatly offended at the implications the Socinians wished to draw from Newton's study, implications which Newton himself had intended to affirm but which Henderson completely missed:

These terms, as boldly labelled on the windows of the Socinian Depository...are: "Sir Isaac Newton on Trinitarian Corruptions of Scripture;" on which it may be proper to remark, that they are obviously designed to answer a twofold purpose. First, they are intended to imbue the public mind with the belief, that Trinitarians, in order to support their system, scruple not to falsify the records of divine truth; and, that this falsification is not confined to a few solitary instances, but has been practised to some considerable extent.... Secondly, the celebrated name of Sir Isaac Newton is put forth to support with its high sanction the cause of Antitrinitarianism; and superficial thinkers, or such as may not possess the means of determining what were the real sentiments of "the first of philosophers," will naturally suppose, that he espoused that cause, and that a system of opinions which commanded the approval of so mighty a mind cannot but be true (Henderson 1830:3).

⁸ In this quote McLachlan does not intend to exclude Newton or Locke from the category of Unitarian, rather, the term was not as popular in their day as it was in Priestley's. Cf. McLachlan (1941:69-114; 117-172).

This, of course, is exactly what the Socinians intended, as did Newton himself.⁹ but Henderson ignorantly went on to claim

that he [Newton] was no Socinian, in the modern acceptation of the term, is beyond dispute.... He animadverts, indeed,...on the orthodox; but it does not appear, that this arose from any hostility to their views respecting the Trinity...(Henderson 1; 2).¹⁰

This explains to some extent why only aspects of Newton's legacy have survived in the annals of the history of Christian thought. With regard to his textual studies and his historical research into primitive Christology, McLachlan offers another partial explanation for the disappearance of the evidence of these influences on later Christian communities:

No single stream of Newton's influence can be traced in any Christian church, but that is simply because whilst his biblical chronology and his

⁹In Newton's *The Third Letter* written at about the same time as Newton's two other studies, never published before the appearance of the twentieth century edition of his collected works, Newton went on to make just the claim that Henderson wanted to deny, namely, that the two Trinitarian variants were just the most significant examples of an array of alterations introduced by orthodox churchmen into the text of Scripture (Newton 1959-77 3:129-144). Horsley, the nineteenth century editor of Newton's works suppressed this and many other of Newton's theological MSS which would have made perfectly clear to the world that Newton was an Antitrinitarian.

¹⁰Typical of such treatments of Newton in surveys of religious thought in the eighteenth century is Abbey and Overton in their *The English Church in the Eighteenth Century* 2nd ed. 1902, "From the beginning to the end of the century, theological thought was mainly concentrated on the effort to make use of reason--God's plain and universal gift to man--as the one divinely appointed instrument for the discovery or investigation of truth.... Newton himself, like his contemporaries, Boyle, Flamsteed, and Halley, was a thoroughly religious man, and his general faith as a Christian was confirmed rather than weakened by his perception of the vast laws which had become disclosed to him. On many others the effect was different" (22). But the effect on Newton was significant as well in terms of significant adjustment, leading to his rejection of Trinitarianism, a point missed or ignored in this assessment.

interpretation of prophecy, with the scriptural foundation of theology on which they are based, have perished beyond peradventure, many of his principles of criticism and some of his doctrinal positions have become the common possession of churches, heterodox and orthodox alike (McLachlan 1941:172).

Newton's unpublished religious writings, were voluminous, draft after draft of works spanning most of his life. When his works were first catalogued by Charles Hutton he discovered that "Many of them [were] copies over and over again...upwards of four thousand sheets" (McLachlan 1950:5). A friend of Newton's commented shortly after Newton's death that the physicist

was much more solicitous in his enquiries into Religion than into Natural Philosophy.... Sir Isaac Newton, to make his inquiries into the Christian religion more successful, had read the ancient writers and ecclesiastical historians with great exactness, and had drawn up in writing great collections out of both and to show how earnest he was in religion, he had written a long explication of remarkable parts of the Old and New Testaments, while his understanding was in its greatest perfection, lest the infidels might pretend that his applying himself to the study of religion was the effect of dotage. That he would not publish these writings in his own time, because they showed that his thoughts were sometimes different from those which are commonly received, which would engage him in dispute; and this was a thing which he avoided as much as possible (McLachlan 1950:2).

The reason he did not want to enter into disputes is because many of these works were critical of Trinitarianism. Hopton Haynes, another friend of Newton's, commented in more explicit terms:

The spirit of Popery is not quite exorcised. It kept in awe, and silenced some extraordinary persons amongst us...and the greatest man of our age, glory of the British Nation, I mean, the renowned Sir I[saac] N[ewton], who, amongst other MSS., has left behind him a short discourse upon the pretended text of St. John (McLachlan 1950:6).

A dual conspiracy of ignorance and design left Newton's true theological views a mystery until a critical biography produced by Louis Trenchard More, *Isaac Newton: A Biography* (1934), set the record straight earlier in this century.

The first editor of Newton's collected works, Bishop Horsley, was a bitter public opponent of that other Unitarian scientist, Joseph Priestley, and chose not to publish Newton's theological treatises which would reveal his Unitarianism (McLachlan 1950:7). And Newton's first biographer, in sheer ignorance, declared Newton a Trinitarian (Brewster: 1831) though in a later *Memoirs of Sir Isaac Newton*, 2 vols. 2nd ed. he modified his views claiming now that Newton's unorthodoxy was simply not proven (Brewster 1855 Vol. 2:339-340),¹¹ a technical judgement based on Scottish law.

Two, more recent treatments of Newton's religious beliefs, have provided a clearer and cogent picture. Again McLachlan must be credited with leading the way with his important though brief, *The Religious Opinions of Milton, Locke and Newton* (1941), followed by Frank Manuel's more detailed treatment: *The Religion of Isaac Newton: the Fremantle Lectures of 1973*.

McLachlan's treatment is helpful in many ways not the least of which was his astute connection of Locke with the thought of Newton. Moreover, he is quick to point out that Newton's published works offer no hint of his christological convictions--except in his omission of any reference to the Trinity, such as in Newton's treatment of the fifth chapter of the Apocalypse of John regarding the worship of God (McLachlan 1941:131). Not until the *Two Notable Corruptions* does Newton's view on the Trinity become manifest. And once his other unpublished theological treatises were made public it became obvious to McLachlan and all subsequent biographers of Newton that plainly,

¹¹Brewster: "Although a traditionary belief has long prevailed that Newton was an Arian, yet the Trinitarians claimed him as a friend, while Socinians...wished it to be believed that he was a supporter of their views.... we are bound to believe that our neighbour is not a heretic till the charge against him has been distinctly proven" (Vol. 2 :339-240). This has now been achieved.

"The controversy about his [Newton's] religious opinions is ended. Sir Isaac Newton was a Unitarian, and, for his day, of an advanced school" (McLachlan 1941:172).

But in order to put to rest any impulse to claim that McLachlan's assessment was tainted by a tendentious treatment we shall now observe the second work alluded to earlier--written by one with no Unitarian bias--and the major modern biographical treatment of Newton in English.

Manuel, known for his two earlier works, *Isaac Newton Historian* (1963) and *Portrait of Isaac Newton* (1968), has earned the reputation of a first-rate authority on Newton, perhaps second only to Westfall. It is of no small significance, therefore, that he casts Newton in the role of a seventeenth-century Erasmus (without ever actually invoking the name of the humanist):

Most of Newton's theological writings are devoted to exposing falsifiers of New Testament texts, prevaricators in Church Councils, corrupters of primitive natural religion, metaphysical befuddlers of the true relations between God and man (Manuel 1974:65).

Moreover, for Newton only

through a circumstantial account of the degradation of the Church in a series of stages and its doctrinal deviation from the primitive creed could Christianity be stripped of its spurious accretions. The original Christian religion was plain, but 'men skilled in the learning of heathens, Cabbalists, and Schoolmen corrupted it with metaphysical sense and thereby making it unintelligible' (68).

As Erasmus, so for Newton:

In the early Church, as interpreted by Newton in his histories, the original formula of Christian belief, the milk for babes, had been contained in a few phrases about God the Creator, Christ, and the Resurrection taken directly out of Scripture. Any later deviations were corruptions (54).

In Newton's own words:

We are commanded by the Apostle (I Tim. 1:3) *to hold fast the form of sound words*. Contending for a language which was not handed down from the

Prophets and Apostles is a breach of the command and they that break it are also guilty of the disturbances and schisms occasioned thereby. It is not enough to say that an article of faith may be deduced from Scripture. It must be expressed in the very form of sound words in which it was delivered by the Apostles. Otherwise there can be no lasting fixity nor peace of the church catholick. for men are apt to vary, dispute, and run into partings about deductions. All the old Heresies lay in deductions; the true faith was in the text (54-55).¹²

For Newton, the Trinity was one of these "old Heresies." Furthermore, since the text alone was authoritative in establishing belief, rather than ecclesiastical tradition coupled with the text, the need to ferret out textual corruptions was as important to Newton as it had been for Erasmus, who had learned to develop a settlement which allowed for tradition but as distinguished from teaching found in the text alone.

Regarding the treatment of the Trinity in Newton's works Manuel reminds us that "the manuscripts on the nature of Christ , written over a period of nearly half a century, remain largely unpublished to this day" (Manuel 1974:57). Newton was no doubt indebted to several non-Trinitarian scholars and churchmen in his close circle of friends, such as Samuel Clarke, William Whiston, Thomas Emlyn, Hopton Hayes and Samuel Crell, but, nevertheless, Manuel rightly acknowledges that Newton "invariably tried to find his own way" (58).

Like Erasmus, Newton contended that the word *God* was only ever properly used in reference to the Father in Scripture. In his own words taken

¹²Like Erasmus, the Apostles' creed was a useful tool for Newton because it was "short and free from repetitions as a symbol of religion ought to be...easy to be understood and remembered by the common people" and because "it contains not mere theories like some of those articles which we have omitted but all its Articles are practical truths on which the whole practice of religion depends" and no one should suffer persecution for holding to other religious opinions outside the clear statements of this creed (Manuel 1974:55).

from Newton's *Paradoxical Questions Concerning the Morals and Actions of Athanasius and His Followers*, Newton affirmed the following:

The heathens made all their Gods of one substance and sometimes called them one God, and yet were polytheists. Nothing can make two persons one God but unity of dominion. And if the Father and the Son be united in dominion, the son being subordinate to the father and sitting in his throne, they can no more be called two Gods then a king and his viceroy can be called two kings (60).

Moreover, prayers were to be directed to "God in the name of the Lamb, but not to the Lamb in the name of God" (61). In short, though Newton "was far from orthodox" and his treatments of the history of the church "continually reiterated his antitrinitarian beliefs" (62), he never allowed his views to be made public, resisting the invitation to become the Luther or Calvin of his age, preferring to allow Trinitarianism to die a natural death. He believed it would one day be considered as untenable as the Roman doctrine of transubstantiation (63).

The consensus on Newton's antitrinitarianism is now well established in the many modern biographies treating his religious views. A. Rupert Hall concluded on this matter in his *Isaac Newton: Adventurer in Thought* (1992) that

Just as Newton saw himself as the restorer of truths known to the Pythagoreans, forgotten during the long reign of Aristotelian and Ptolemaic error, so also he saw himself as the restorer of long-hid truths of religion. The very Greek word which was chosen at Nicaea to express the true faith as seen by Athanasius (*homoousios*= 'of the same nature') was a fraud.... As Newton read history, the corrupt victory of the Trinitarians had led to the evil ascendancy of the Bishop of Rome, for Arianism had always won most followers in the Hellenized portion of the Roman empire. The Reformation had reduced this evil but not corrected the root mistake in belief (Hall 1992:240-241).

Gale E. Christianson in his *In the Presence of the Creator: Isaac Newton and His Times* (1984), has not failed to underscore the irony of Newton's post at Trinity College, Cambridge:

When Henry VIII issued royal letters in 1546 calling for the creation of a new Cambridge college in honour of the "Holy and Undivided Trinity," the monarch never dreamed that its most gifted scholar would one day reject the very Christian doctrine for which the institution was named.... Sometime in the early 1670s, unbeknownst to anyone but himself, Newton became a heretic, hardly a laughing matter in a century marked by profound religious fervour and sectarian strife. He did so by embracing the teaching of Arius, an Alexandrian priest of the fourth century who steadfastly denied that Jesus was of the same substance as God (Christianson 1984:248-249).

Derek Gjertsen in his *The Newton Handbook* (1986) records under the entry "Athanasius" the following:

Newton came to see the fourth century as the time in which the church allowed its original divine revelation to become corrupted by human additions. At the centre of this conspiracy he saw the Council of Nicaea and the figure of Athanasius. Newton soon became obsessed by the period and set out to master the largely polemical and frequently meretricious literature spawned by the period (Gjertsen 1986:42).

Under the heading "William Whiston" he further noted that Whiston seems to have been the first explicitly and publicly to reveal Newton's Arianism. In his *A Collection of Authentic records Belonging to the Old and New Testament* (1727-8) he noted that Newton had long held that "Arianism is no other than the Old uncorrupted Christianity.... This was occasionally known to those few who were intimate with him all along; from whom, notwithstanding his prodigious fearful, cautious, and suspicious Temper, he could not always conceal so important a Discovery" (Gjertsen:42).

Finally, the classic Newton biography of our age, Richard S. Westfall's *Never At Rest: A Biography of Isaac Newton* (1980), addresses Newton's christological views in some detail. Westfall observes that Newton's notebooks seem to suggest that "almost the first fruit of Newton's theological study was doubt about the status of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity," probably the fruit of his contemplation of ordination (Westfall 1980:311). After Newton surveyed the works of the early fathers, in a rather comprehensive manner, Westfall also notes along with the observations of others, that eventually

The conviction began to possess him that a massive fraud, which began in the fourth and fifth centuries, had perverted the legacy of the early church. Central to the fraud were the Scriptures, which Newton began to believe had been corrupted to support trinitarianism. In the notebook, he recorded doubts about a number of passages, not only 1 John 5:7 and I Timothy 3:16, on which he later wrote an essay called "Two Notable Corruptions of the Scripture," but also a number of other passages that appeared in a further study (Westfall 1980:313).

Furthermore, Newton had detected doctrinally motivated interpolations supporting Trinitarianism in the works of Ignatius; and Athanasius, he believed, had also corrupted the proclamation of the Council of Serdica to the same end. For Newton, "worshipping Christ as God was idolatry, to him the fundamental sin," hence the early church had fallen into this, one of the worst possible errors, which would culminate in the wholesale corruption of the medieval church (Westfall:314-315).

Finally, Westfall corrected assessed that before 1675 "Newton had become an Arian in the original sense of the term" (Westfall:315).

Certainly Westfall is correct when he assures us that "Newton concealed his views so effectively that only in our day has full knowledge of them become available" (Westfall:319). But today no historical point could be more beyond doubt than that Newton was no Trinitarian and that his understanding of textual corruption played a significant role in inspiring the quest for a more primitive text, as well as a more primitive, Erasmian Christianity.

2. Newton's Text Criticism and Erasmian Primitivism

Not only had Newton discovered the laws of the universe, with the help of Erasmus's *Annotationes* he had also uncovered *Two Notable Corruptions of the Scriptures* (1690), used traditionally to support the Trinity. Newton and the Newtonians then provided this textual data to others who would use it positively

to call for a simple, non-Trinitarian faith, which would trickle down to the masses. Reedy discovered this use of variants by the Socinians in his study *The Bible and Reason: Anglicans and Scripture in Late Seventeenth-Century England*:

[T]he Socinian tracts fulfil the anxiety...that Socinians might press the new textual criticism into service. Again and again, the tracts argue that the Unitarian texts of Scripture are incorruptible and that key Trinitarian texts rest on faulty copies.... Socinian higher criticism comes into its own in the tracts written in the 1690s.... It is probable that these tracts exhibit the first successful integration of modern textual scholarship in Scripture into a sustained theological project (Reedy 123-124).

What he seems to have missed, however, was the significance of Newton's study as the fountainhead of evidence for the antitrinitarians and how they used his data on the variants in popular paraphrases of the English Bible. This was a method Erasmus had used to communicate his *Philosophia Christi* to the reading public in the sixteenth century. These paraphrases would play a major role in fostering both non-conformist religion, and also a new climate of religious tolerance: if the textual variants spelled the dissolution of a sterile orthodoxy, they also invited the discovery of a new, more scientific and invigorating Christianity. We will begin by directing our attention to Newton's contribution and then in turn address the other Newtonians who carried his project forward.

Margaret Jacob has provided us with a series of concentrated social and intellectual studies treating those in the tight circle surrounding Newton and influenced by his ideas.¹³ Michael Hunter is less convinced that these "Newtonians" can be so clearly defined and classed (Hunter 1981 [1992]:185-186) in terms of their common social interests, designs, or debt to Newtonian science. This chapter will help to put Jacob's thesis on a little firmer footing.

¹³ "John Toland and the Newtonian Ideology," (1969); *The Newtonians and the English Revolution 1689-1720* (1976 [1990]); *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans* (1981).

Here I will demonstrate that those in Newton's orbit who had an interest in a scientific determination of the best recension of the Greek N.T. were nearly all interested in gaining a degree of political religious tolerance through such Biblical criticism (Locke, Whiston, Le Clerc, Clarke); but at the very least they were *all* of one mind in desiring, like Newton himself, to off-set Deistic scepticism by means of such scientific criticism (Bentley). Neither Jacob nor Hunter have treated this dimension in the discussion.

A.J. Ayer observed concerning Voltaire's *Lettres philosophiques* (1734),¹⁴ that,

In some ways, the most interesting of the letters in which Voltaire treats of the state of religion in England at the time of his visit is the seventh and last, of which the subject is said to be Socinians, Arians, or Anti-Trinitarians.... Voltaire did not claim to have discovered any Socinians...but he did assert that the Arian Heresy was gaining ground in England and named Isaac Newton and Samuel Clarke as its most illustrious adherents (Ayer 1986:42-43).

As a matter of fact Voltaire arrived only in time to attend the funeral of Newton in April of 1727 but discovered Newton's theological views from Samuel Clarke who was an Arian pastor and a close friend of Newton's (Westfall 1980:825). Voltaire made his observation about Newton and other non-Trinitarian Newtonians in his letter in the following terms:

There is a small sect here composed of priests and a few very clever laymen who do not adopt the name of Arians nor of Socinians, but are not at all of the opinion of St. Athanasius in the matter of the Trinity, but tell you straight out that the Father is greater than the Son.... the Arian faction is beginning to revive in England as well as in Holland and Poland. The great

¹⁴ An English version of these, *Letters concerning the English Nation* by *M. de Voltaire*, was published in London a year earlier. Voltaire greatly admired England not just for its freer atmosphere as compared to the feudal like intolerance of France, but he also had more respect for thinkers like Locke and Newton over the purely abstract philosophy of Descartes.

Mr. Newton honoured this opinion by favouring it: this philosopher thought that the Unitarians reasoned more mathematically than we do.... It is not amusing that Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, writers nobody can read, have founded sects that divide up Europe, that the ignorant Mahomet has given a religion to Asia and Africa, but that Newton, Clarke, Locke, Leclerc, the greatest thinkers and finest writers of their age, have hardly managed to establish a little flock, and even that dwindles day by day (Voltaire 1980:42-43).

The closest Newton ever came to making public his non-Trinitarian views was when he sent Locke a manuscript which contained one of the most comprehensive text-critical studies ever conducted up to that time, produced with all the rigour and precision that the greatest scientific mind of the day could have brought to the discipline.¹⁵ Here Newton had discovered what he called: *Two Notable Corruptions of Scripture*, which demonstrated to his mind that the Trinity was, indeed, a later theological development within the Church. The hard evidence for this was to be found in theologically significant textual variants that had been interpolated into the text of the New Testament at different stages.

This line of reasoning had been around since the days of Servetus, Socinus and significantly, even earlier in Erasmus, but this was usually routinely dismissed by the orthodox as the results of a tendentious treatment of the evidence. Not until the late seventeenth century was there enough hard data derived from MS collations and investigations of the Scripture quotations of the early church fathers, for a scientific argument to be made. John Mill's *Novum Testamentum* with its most comprehensive collection of MS data at that time, while begun as early as 1675 would not appear until 1707, seventeen years after the completion of Newton's *Two Notable Corruptions*.

¹⁵ On the weight of this study, H.W. Turnbull, one of the editors of the critical edition of Newton's correspondence, rightly judged that this "places Newton in the forefront among biblical scholars of the time" (Newton 1961 vol. III:xiv).

Newton appears, nevertheless, to have been in touch with Mill regarding the latter's New Testament project as his extant correspondence reveals. Here we see a side of Newton that does not readily come to mind as a natural association, namely, Newton the text critic. Returning a copy of the Greek New Testament to Mill, in his cover letter, dated 29 Jan. 1693, Newton gives us a glimpse at the text critic at work:

I fear you think I have kept your book too long: But to make some amends for detaining it so long I have sent you not only my old collations so far as they vary from yours, but also some new ones of Dr. Covils two MSS. for I have collated them anew and sent you those readings which were either omitted in your printed ones or there erroneously printed. In collating these MSS I set the readings in the margin of your book and thence transcribed them into a sheet of paper which you will find in your book at the end of the Apocalypse, together with my old collations and a copy of a side of Beza's MS [the famous Codex *Bezae* or "D"].... In your little MS book, which I return, you tied up together with your New Testament, you will find those transcripts you desired out of MSS, except two which were in such running hands that I could not imitate them, nor did it seem worth the while the MSS being very new ones (Newton 1961, vol. III:303-304).

Mill was most gracious in thanking Newton for the collations:

I have received the N.T. together with...lections, out of the 2 copies of Dr. Covel: and those other readings you have observed in the Complutentian and the Oriental Versions, and some of the Fathers upon the Apocalypse.... And now it comes to my turn...to give you once again my most hearty thanks for this singular instance of your kindness to me and the work I have in hand (Newton 1961:305-307).¹⁶

While the printing of Mill's N.T. began as early as 1686 it was not completed until 1691 (the proof copy, not for publication) (Fox 1954:61-62); and his *prolegomena*, which contained perhaps the last defence of the *comma Johanneum* by an English editor of the Greek N.T., was not printed until 1706.

¹⁶ Cf. also Mill's earlier and very interesting letter to Newton from November of the same year, Newton (1961:289-290).

Moreover, it seems that Newton had not made Mill's acquaintance until 1693 when they met at Cambridge (Westfall 1980:506). Therefore, it would appear that Newton was in no way indebted to Mill for the information in his *Two Corruptions* (if anything, Mill was indebted to Newton for some of his collation data). Newton was more than capable of collecting it all from earlier collations and by consulting Greek MSS directly, as well as editions of the versions and fathers first hand.

It appears that Locke first raised the issue of the status of the *comma* treating the three heavenly witnesses, thus prompting Newton to send him his study. We know that Locke had a very high regard for Newton's ability in Biblical studies because he commented in a letter to his cousin that "Mr. Newton is really a very valuable man, not only for his wonderful skill in mathematics, but in divinity too, and his knowledge in the Scriptures, wherein I know no equal" (King 1830 Vol. 2:39); and in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* Locke speaks of Newton as one of the master-builders of the age, "the incomparable Mr. Newton" in contrast to whom Locke is content to "be employed as an Under-Labourer in clearing Ground a little, and removing some of the Rubbish, that lies in the way to knowledge" (Locke 1975:10).

In a letter from Newton to Locke, in reply to one from Locke which is no longer extant, Newton speaks of sending Locke "the papers which you desire" (Newton 1961 vol. 3:79). The papers were his "letters" to Locke treating the *Two Notable Corruptions*. In my opinion it was Locke who prompted Newton to do the study. In this same letter we read that Newton has yet to complete the work, complaining that "the consulting of authors [was] proving more tedious than I expected so as to make me defer sending them till the next week." The tone is one of expressing regret at not fulfilling an obligation sooner.

No doubt Locke has asked Newton to prepare this MS for publication in the *La Bibliothèque Universelle*, founded by Jean Le Clerc and contributed to by Locke (Aaron 1973:22), because in his next letter to Locke Newton remarks:

I send you now by the carrier...the papers I promised. I fear I...made them too long by an addition. For upon the receipt of your letter, reviewing what I had by me concerning the text 1 John 5.7 & examining authors a little further about it, I met with something new concerning that other of 1 Tim. 3.16, which I thought would be acceptable to inquisitive men, & might be set down in a little room.... I fear the length of what I say on both texts may occasion you too much trouble, & therefore if at present you get only what concerns the first done into French, that of the other may stay till we see what success the first will have (Newton 1961:82).

Newton is concerned about the length, both because it must be translated into French, and because of the space constraints of a journal. Moreover, his comment about "that other of 1 Tim. 3.16" would lead one to think that this variant had perhaps also been raised in a previous letter from Locke. Locke has heard that Newton has done some research on these verses and has asked him to put together a journal length essay on the subject for Le Clerc's journal and so Newton is quite content to see the treatment appear in two instalments.

Newton would have his work appear anonymously, following the example of Locke in so many of his publications (as also practiced by Erasmus à la his *Julius exclusus*) because to question the authenticity of the *comma* even in the seventeenth century--as Mill so well understood and as Bentley would soon find out--was to admit to being an Arian, which would bar one from university posts, civil posts and obviously ecclesiastical livings.

This was of no small concern to Newton whose post at Trinity College provided him with the barest subsistence. On this deplorable situation Newton's most celebrated biographer, the University of Edinburgh educated and Principal, Sir David Brewster, complained in bitter tones:

We do envy the reader who peruses these simple details without a blush of shame for his country. That Locke...could not obtain an appointment for the author of the *Principia*, will hardly be believed in any country but our own.... The ingratitude of his country disturbed, as we shall see, the tranquillity of a mind sensitively organized, and intellectually overwrought. At the age of fifty, the high priest of science found himself the inmate of a college, and, but for the generous patronage of a friend, he would have died within its walls (Brewster 1855 vol. 2:118).

Brewster's euphemistic allusion to the disturbance of Newton's mind was to nothing less than a mental break-down Newton experienced in the summer of 1693, the result of not finding a suitable living combined with what can only be described as a form of paranoia.¹⁷ Traces of this severe state of mind can be seen in earlier correspondence to Locke from early in 1691:

Being fully convinced that Mr. Mountague, upon an old grudge which I thought had been worn out, is false to me, I have done with him.... I have no fair prospect of seeing you any more unless you will be so kind as to repay that visit I made you the last year. If I may hope for this favour I pray bring my papers with you. Otherwise I desire you would send them by some convenient messenger when opportunity shall serve (Newton 1961:192-193).

The papers he requires from Locke are his treatises treating the *Two Notable Corruptions*. We do not have Locke's letter in reply but in Newton's next letter he expresses dismay that the project had already gone forward:

Your former letters came not to my hands but this I have. I was of opinion my papers had lain still & am sorry to heare there is news about them. Let me entreat you to stop their translation & impression so soon as you can for I designe to suppress them (Newton 1961:195).

Locke had already made a copy and sent it on to Le Clerc. Le Clerc then suggested that Newton review Simon's work which had just been published in

¹⁷ For treatments of this see, Brewster vol. 2:183-186; More 1934:380-392; Hall 1992:242-246; Westfall 1980:533-540; Gjertsen 1986:88-90; Johnson and Wolbarsht 1979:1-9; Spargo and Pounds 1979:11-32; Ditchburn 1980:1-16.

1689 and translated into English that same year and had an extended treatment of the three heavenly witnesses. After Locke sent back the MS to Newton he appears to have then read Simon and made additional notes in the margin of his MS which can still be seen in the New College MSS. at the Bodleian Library.

When Locke informed Le Clerc that Newton now desired the MS to be suppressed, Le Clerc regretfully remarked,

It is a pity that these two dissertations should be suppressed. I do not think that any person could find out that they were translated, unless it were said so. In a matter of this kind, where I would not fail to seize the meaning of the author, I would have given it an original air which would not have savoured of a translation (Brewster 1855 vol. 2:326).

From this we gather that Newton was afraid of being found out, which would result in his losing his post at Trinity College because of his Arian views. Such is just what happened to his close associate, William Whiston. Whiston had been appointed to Newton's old chair of Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge in 1703, and was deposed on charges of Arianism in 1710.

The imperfect copy of Newton's MS sent to Le Clerc was deposited by him in the Library of the Remonstrants where it was eventually found and ascribed to Newton by the Socinian text critic Johann Jakob Wettstein in the *Prolegomena* of his *Novum Testamentum* of 1730 (McLachlan 1941:137-140).¹⁸ Wettstein was also deposed from his ministerial post by the Town Council in Basel for claiming, just as Newton had, that 1 Tim. 3:16 had been corrupted to support Trinitarianism, the same year his Greek Testament appeared (Hulbert-Powell 1937:47).

¹⁸ McLachlan appears to have been the first to discover Wettstein's acquaintance with Newton's MS and point out that Wettstein's biographer, Hulbert-Powell (1937), seems to have completely missed this important point.

McLachlan speculates, correctly I believe, that it was Wettstein who was responsible for adding the missing parts from this defective MS and who was responsible for its being first published anonymously, in London, in 1754. So in the end, rather than the treatise appearing in either Latin or French in Holland in 1691, a Dutchman has arranged to have it published in England, sixty-three years later, in its original English. I give you Wettstein's account of the MS from his *Prolegomena*:

That illustrious man, Sir Isaac Newton, wrote in English two Letters on the true reading of I John v. 7 and I Timothy iii. 16; with such critical judgement and such diligence, having collected from every quarter all the recorded evidence by means of which the problems could be elucidated, from codices, versions, Latin and Greek Fathers and ecclesiastical history, that he almost reduced the question to a mathematical demonstration; a task which scarcely seemed possible to be effected by any man, least of all by a person engaged in a totally different line of study. These epistles John Locke transcribed with his own hand, and communicated to Le Clerc, who made mention of them in 1708, in his letter prefixed to Kuster's reprint of Mill.... After the death of the learned Professor Le Clerc (1736), these two Letters, but unfortunately mutilated, the one at the beginning, the other at the end, were put into my hands, along with a bundle of letters written to him, in order that they might be placed in the Library of the Remonstrants (McLachlan 1941:137-138).¹⁹

Why so much controversy surrounding two text critical studies of two variants in the Greek N.T.? While only two, they supplied Newton and the Newtonians of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with hard evidence that the foundation on which Establishment Protestantism was based in England was a fabrication, analogous in their minds to the discovery Valla made of the forged *Donation of Constantine*, on the basis of which the Roman Church had argued so long for her primacy over the civil powers. The implications were just as important to non-Trinitarians: if the basis for establishment orthodoxy was in

¹⁹Cf. also Wettstein's *Prolegomena* (1751:185).

doubt, surely the religious intolerance that followed from it was thoroughly unjustified. And just as Erasmus used his paraphrases of the New Testament as a way of communicating a simple, non-dogmatic, non-ritualistic Christianity, in Britain these post-revolution Newtonians saw these textual variants as one means to their eventual social and political acceptance. All the more reason for the conformist textual scholars to resist such implications.

The Deist Anthony Collins had demanded to know how one could still believe in *verbal inspiration* with Mill having acknowledged there were over 30,000 textual variants now well established. Bentley's reply was that, choose as you may among the many possibilities, no doctrine would ever be affected. Newton had done just that and doctrine *had* been affected, in his judgement and the judgement of others, in a profound way. In his conclusion to his third letter (cir. November 1690) in the series treating the *Two Notable Corruptions*, Newton had said:

By these instances it's manifest that the scriptures have been very much corrupted in the first ages & chiefly in the fourth Century in the times of the Arian Controversy. And to the shame of Christians be it spoken the Catholics are here much more guilty of these corruptions then the heretics.... The Catholics ever made the corruptions (so far as I can yet find) & then to justify & propagate them exclaimed against the Heretics & old Interpreters, as if the ancient genuine readings & translations had been corrupted.... All which I mention out of the great hatred I have to pious

frauds, & to shame Christians out of these practices (Newton 1961:138-139).²⁰

In these discoveries Newton was significantly indebted to the data in Erasmus's *Annotationes*; in his playing out of the drama involved in bringing these scriptural corruptions to the attention of the learned world, he was continuing the plea for tolerance and reflection that was so much a part of the legacy of Erasmus.²¹ If Erasmus had liberated the church from medieval corruptions, the Newtonians saw themselves in a similar role, liberating Protestantism from the textual corruptions of Trinitarianism. As Westfall observed, "Newton became impatient with interruptions from minor diversions such as optics and mathematics. He had committed himself to a reinterpretation of the tradition central to the whole of European civilization" (Westfall:315). The *Two Notable Corruptions* was the most important contribution to this process in the eighteenth century.

²⁰ It is a point of some interest that the most recent monographic treatments of the history of New Testament criticism (Kümmel 1972; Reventlow 1985; O'Neill 1991; Baird 1992), while careful to note the influence of English Deism and Newtonian physics on the development of Biblical criticism, nevertheless have nothing to say about Newton's contribution to textual criticism which was both fundamental in its trajectory and much more persuasive in the long run because of Newton's attachment to a traditional piety and reverence for revealed religion.

²¹ Westfall rightly points out that Newton actually "identified himself with Arius, both intellectually and emotionally. He relived the terrible struggles of the fourth century, when doctrine counted for more than charity, came to see Athanasius as his personal nemesis, and learned to hate him fiercely" (Westfall:318). This would be analogous to the animosity Erasmus felt for the caretakers of orthodoxy among certain of the Spanish clergy.

B. Bentley's Ideology of Harmless Engagement

There is evidence to suggest Bentley was not completely in the dark regarding Newton's unpublished treatise addressing the Christological variants. If this is the case, when he challenged the knave to "choose as he might" among the many variants because no doctrine would ever be affected, he may have been doing so by way of bad faith and by way of *argumentum ad populum*. This would not be beyond Bentley's personality.²²

There was a bit of a calculating side to Bentley, along with his "lively style, often combative or derisive" (DNB:308). While he had already earned a reputation as perhaps the supreme classical scholar of his day with the publication of his *Epistola ad Millium* 1691, with his uncovering of the forgery of the Letters of Phalaris (in William Wotton's *Reflections on Ancient and Modern Learning*, 1697 and in his own *Dissertation on the Letters of Phalaris*, 1699) he had also earned marks as one who was relentless in treating the issue of the historical integrity of a document. Nevertheless, this was combined with a gift for making enemies.

Ellis took note of Bentley's many controversies at Cambridge and with others in the following terms:

It was remarked by Dr. Bentley's adversaries, that whenever he was placed in peril for mal-administration of his college, his practice was to come forward with some literary production which might interest the public in favour of its author, and that therefore a share of the merit of his works was due to his

²²On Bentley's life and work see Monk, 1830; Jebb, 1882; Bartholomew, 1908; Ellis, 1862; White, 1968; Fox, 1954:105-126; Hulbert-Powell, 1937:302ff; Brink, 1985:21-83.

persecutors. A comparison of dates does certainly tend to establish in many instances the truth of this observation (Ellis:xi, n.3).²³

Before Bentley presented his famous Boyle Lectures arguing the scientific defense for the existence of God, based on Newton's *Principia*, he consulted Newton to assure the correctness of his presentation and four letters from Newton resulted (More:376).²⁴ Newton's *Principia* was not readily accessible to the grasp of most because of the mathematical proofs. It is to Bentley, therefore, to whom "belongs the undoubted merit of having been the first to lay open these discoveries in a popular form, and to explain their irresistible force in the proof of a Deity" (Monk:32).

Moreover, Harris points out that

It is worth noting also Bentley's link with Newton; when the former lived in London as Royal Librarian Newton was one of that remarkable group--the other members were Evelyn, Wren and Locke--which met weekly at Bentley's lodgings in St. James (Harris 1962:215).

Bentley and Newton shared a mutual respect for one another's achievements. While in the end Bentley would be the only prominent member of the inner circle of Newtonians concerned with Biblical textual variants not to be an Antitrinitarian he nevertheless felt a kinship with Newton and the others in their mutual goal of offering a scientific basis for defending the faith against the many various manifestations of scepticism. That Bentley must have known of Newton's treatise discovering the Trinitarian textual corruptions is almost certain, the following evidence would suggest.

²³An epitaph proposed for Bentley by Hilaire Belloc was, "His sins were scarlet, but his books were read," found on the title page of White (1968).

²⁴These letters are extant and are located in Trinity College, Cambridge.

Newton had completed his critique by 1690 and their correspondence began in 1692. Perhaps it was Newton's treatise that actively prompted Bentley to lecture on the *comma* in 1717. It is at least possible that Newton secretly shared his treatise with Bentley.²⁵ More about Bentley's lecture on the *comma* in a moment.

Further evidence that Bentley probably did know of the treatise, however, is provided by William Whiston (1667-1752) in his *Historical Memoirs of the Life of Dr. Samuel Clarke* (1730). Whiston who was appointed to Newton's professorship in 1703 was an Arian (he called himself an Eusebian) and was banished from the University in 1710 because of this. In this work he provides evidence that a circle of Newton's friends knew about the treatise and its author at least as early as 1719 (and no doubt earlier):

The next year, 1719, Dr. Clarke desired me to write a Commentary on the first Epistle of St. John: which request I complied with. He also at another time recommended to me to write against the Genuineness of that famous text in the first Epistle of St. John, Chap. v. 7 concerning the three that bear record in Heaven, which he knew I believed to be an Interpolation. But as we both knew that Sir Isaac Newton had written such a Dissertation already, and I was then engaged in other pursuits, I excused my self at that time; and we both agreed to recommend that matter to Mr Emlyn: which work he undertook and performed with great impartiality and accuracy (Whiston 1730:100).

Thomas Emlyn (1663-1741), an Arian,²⁶ spent over two years in prison (from 14 June 1703 to 21 July, 1705) in addition to being fined a thousand

²⁵In his cover letter to Locke, Newton had said that he was sending Locke the original and had "no entire copy besides". It is difficult to believe he did not save a draft and that perhaps he said what he did to make certain what he was sending did not get lost and fall into the wrong hands (More:632).

²⁶"Mr. Emlyn settled down into a kind of Arianism, which it does not appear that he ever afterwards deserted, though he classed himself under the general title of *Unitarian*, in his publications" (Wallace 1850 vol. 3:507).

Pounds (later reduced to seventy Pounds) for his beliefs, having been found guilty of blasphemous libel in 1703. After his conviction,

The pillory, he was told, was the punishment due, but, on account of his being a man of letters, it was not inflicted! He was then led round the Four Courts, with a paper on his breast, for the purpose of exposing him to public odium; and even this disgraceful treatment was spoken of, by the Lord Chief Justice, as merciful, because in Spain or Portugal the sentence would have been nothing less than burning (Wallace 1850 Vol. 3:522).

He had indeed written just such a treatise as referred to by Whiston, his, *A Full Enquiry into the Original Authority of that Text, John v.7, There are Three That Bear Record in Heaven*, 1715, which was as careful and judicious as Collins's work was rash and bold. No surprise, therefore, that at the conclusion of this one of the most important works in the history of English Antitrinitarianism Emlyn pleads to "Both Houses of Convocation now Assembled" for political and social tolerance. For Emlyn, as for so many other Antitrinitarians, this was obviously much more than a bit of arcane theological debate:

With all the respect due to so venerable a Body, and with the Humility of a suppliant, I beseech to consider of this matter, as in the sight of God; whether here be not sufficient evidence that this text either certainly, or at least very probably never was originally in the Holy Writings of St. John, but unwarrantably thrust in in later times (Emlyn 1746 vol. 2: 151).

He went on further to say that if it was agreed that the passage *was* a late interpolation--and his command of the evidence in response to John Mill's arguments in their favour certainly seemed to suggest such--it should no longer be printed in the Bible (or at the least it should be put in different type making known to the masses its doubtful status):

Our *twentieth article* tells us, *The church is the witness and keeper of Holy Writ*: and therefore must not bear *false* or *uncertain witness* in so solemn a matter, as to say *that* is Holy Writ, *which* she has the greatest reason to judge is not *such*. 'Tis a dismal thing to have it said to *your* flocks, *thus saith the Lord, when the Lord hath not spoken it*: and a hard task it is on him that reads *this* in the church for *St. John's* words, who doth not believe *it* to be *such*.... In the case

before you, 'tis *too late* to conceal the evidence *against the text* I have treated of; it has been *long* observ'd, *oft* objected, and much needs satisfaction. And if *your Lordships* and the *Reverend Clergy* shall please to instruct us, *by better evidence*, that there is *no wrong* done to the *text* of St. *John*; or being convinced that *there is*, shall hereupon promote a just alteration of *this* in our printed books, according to *all* the *Greek manuscripts*, that so *your people* may see that, at least, you take it for *doubtful*; will not *this* upright method shew to the world, that you are *fair* and ingenuous beyond exception, and that you seek after *truth in the love of it* (Emlyn 1746 vol.2:153;155)?

The Antitrinitarians were convinced they had the data on their side, if only a fair minded relationship would intervene between them and the church authorities. Richard Bentley provided just such help.

In 1717 Bentley was appointed to the academic post most valuable as well as most dignified in the University, "Regius Professor of Divinity" (Monk: 343). To such a post goes the requirement of a *Praelection* or probationary lecture. On the first day of May Bentley gave his lecture addressing the subject of the Three Heavenly Witnesses--the *comma Johanneum*. In denying its authenticity, he was doing so "as the prince of critics upon such a question" (Monk:348).²⁷

It was Emlyn's treatise that had focused attention on this question, giving rise to Bentley's authoritative denunciation of the passage, ²⁸ to the great delight of the Antitrinitarians. It matters not that Bentley retained his Trinitarianism while giving up the verse because as an esteemed member of the University and the established Church he could hardly have done otherwise. Nevertheless, he may well have been the first English text critic of such status to publicly

²⁷Monk adds, "The composition excited great sensation at the time and long afterwards" (348). It was written in Latin but never published and Monk was never able to locate the MS, though he believed it to be still in existence in his day (1830).

²⁸Although, Bentley had been debating the issue, probably with Joseph Craven (see Bartholomew: 20), in 1715. The account of this is found in *Two Letters to the Reverend Dr. Bentley* London, 1717.

denounce this proof text for the Trinity as a corruption. Prior to this those denouncing the passage had usually also given up the Trinity.

Bentley succeeded in carrying the day for the Antitrinitarians, though this was far from his own intentions. By admitting such theological development at the textual level he did their cause a world of good. Bentley's protest that the dogma of the Trinity did not need such a false support and yet the dogma remained untouched was, in minds of Antitrinitarians, to beg the question in the starkest terms. The treatise, however, strangely, never appeared in print. It can be conjectured that such an important treatise having never seen the light of day in published form may well have been in order to deny the Antitrinitarians support from a *Trinitarian* Churchman. Anglicans still had the props of the creeds and liturgy to support their Trinitarianism. But the Antitrinitarians were certain that once the concession was made about the *comma*, it would carry its own force and in time it would set minds thinking in a fresh direction toward the problem of the Trinity in terms of its Biblical predication. William Whiston acknowledged this, while also pointing out Bentley's dependence on Emlyn's earlier work (and perhaps on Newton's as well) on the subject:

This treatise [Emlyn's], as I have been informed, was alluded to by Dr. Bentley in his own famous lecture at Cambridge soon afterward, when he stood Candidate for the Chair of Regius Professor of Divinity: wherein he also entirely gave up that text, and publicly proved it to be spurious....Which in so zealous and warm a Trinitarian deserves to be taken great notice of, as a singular instance of honesty and impartiality (Whiston 1730: 100-101).

Moreover, however, Bentley had suggested the verse might be deleted in his proposed edition of the Greek N.T. in his response to *Two Letters to the Reverend Dr. Bentley* (1717). This prompted the author of the two letters--probably Dr. Joseph Craven, D.D.--to suggest in reply that

The Enemies of the Orthodox Faith assume great Advantages to themselves, from a supposed want of Authority, in that of St. *John*, 1 Ep. v. 7. which

gave occasion to this Commerce: And they make repeated *Ovations* over that suppositious Defect; and take Occasions for them, from a Report, that Dr. *Bentley's* Edition will omit it.... And then...the Enemies of Revealed Religion find their Account in that which they desire may be *An Uncertainty in the Rule of Faith* ([Craven] 1717:2-3).

On this very point Edward Gibbon would seem to be an apt fulfilment of the prediction.

C. Gibbon's Scepticism

If we return to Lambe's two categories of critics and sceptics, while Newton clearly belongs to the former, he bears some responsibility for inspiring those who fit the latter. What was perceived by Newton and the Newtonians as a scientific attempt to return to primitive Christianity by challenging Trinitarianism and the authoritative institutionalized expression of orthodox Christianity, others saw as the occasion for the collapse of Christianity proper. Ironically, Newton's *physica sacra* was intended, in Manuel's words, to harmonize the book of nature (natural theology) with the book of sacred Scripture (revealed theology), for some the result was the gobbling up of the one into the other. A "Secular Newtonianism" emerged, betraying "the coupling of the two realms--the religious and the scientific--in the syncretistic fantasy of a scientific genius and a God seeker" (Manuel 1974:49).

The secular Newtonianism would destroy the sacred view of science--as advocated by Newton--and bring religion to the bar of a secularised scientific criteria. Edward Gibbon was perhaps the most celebrated, popular expression of the early results of secular Newtonism.

Gibbon's strange and volatile relationship with religion has been given a fair treatment by Shelby McCloy in his *Gibbon's Antagonism to Christianity* (1933). Like Erasmus, he also saw the supreme moral worth of Jesus's teaching

as parallel with that of Socrates (Gibbon 1899 Vol. 5:206).²⁹ Erasmus was for him the founder of "a secret reformation" which

Since the days of Luther and Calvin...has been silently working in the bosom of the reformed churches; many weeds of prejudice were eradicated; and the disciples of Erasmus diffused a spirit of freedom and moderation. The liberty of conscience has been claimed as a common benefit, an inalienable right: the free governments of Holland and England introduced the practice of toleration.... the predictions of Catholics are accomplished; the web of mystery is unravelled by the Arminians, Arians, and Socinians, whose numbers must not be computed from their separate congregations (Gibbon 1895 vol.6:253-255.).

In a footnote he comments further, "Erasmus may be considered as the father of rational theology...after a slumber of a hundred years, it was revived by the Arminians of Holland, Grotius, Limborch, and Le Clerc; in England by Chillingworth, the Latitudinarians of Cambridge... "(254).

When treating the Nicene Creed's pronouncement that Christ was God, Gibbon noted in his *Decline and Fall* in a footnote that:

This strong expression might be justified by the language of St. Paul (I Tim. iii.16), but we are deceived by our modern Bibles. The word ò (which) was altered to θεός (God) at Constantinople in the beginning of the sixth century: the true reading, which is visible in the Latin and Syriac versions, still exists in the reasoning of the Greek, as well as of the Latin fathers; and this fraud, with that of the three witnesses of St. John, is admirably detected by Sir Isaac Newton.... I have weighed the arguments, and may yield to the authority, of the first of philosophers, who was deeply skilled in critical and theological studies (Gibbon 1895 vol. 5:207 [xlvii, IV]).

Obviously, Gibbon's thought was informed to a significant extent by arguments and judgements made by Newton. McCloy mentions in a footnote

²⁹The edition I employ is the *Bohn's Standard Library* edition with notes by Guizot, Wenck, Schreiter, and Hugo, published by George Bell and Sons 1895-1899.

that among the busts in Gibbon's library at Lausanne, consisting of Rousseau, Voltaire and Locke, was to be found one of Newton (McCloy 1933:40).

Not only was Newton's *Two Notable Corruptions* published in 1754, referred to by Gibbon but both Porson and Travis, in their extensive debate surrounding Gibbon's comments on the spuriousness of the *comma Johanneum*, knew of Newton's work on this variant.

Unlike Newton, Gibbon expresses no sympathy for the Arians in his historical treatment of that movement but notes with Newton in his *Decline and Fall* that the efforts of the orthodox party to defeat the Arians' theology resulted in "fictions, which must be stigmatized with the epithets of fraud and forgery" (Gibbon vol. 4:145, chp. xxxvii, VIII).³⁰ Here clearly are echoes of Newton. The passage though extensive merits a full quotation:

The Catholics, oppressed by royal and military force, were far superior to their adversaries in number and learning. With the same weapons which the Greeks and Latin fathers had already provided for the Arian controversy, they repeatedly silenced, or vanquished, the fierce and illiterate successors of Ulphilas. The consciousness of their own superiority might have raised them above the arts and passions of religious warfare. Yet, instead of assuming such honourable pride, the orthodox theologians were tempted, by the assurance of impunity, to compose fictions, which must be stigmatized with the epithets of fraud and forgery. They ascribe their own polemical works to the most venerable names of Christian antiquity; the characters of Athanasius and Augustin were awkwardly personated by Vigilus and his disciples; and the famous creed which so clearly expounds the mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation is deduced, with strong probability, from this African school. Even the scriptures themselves were profaned by their rash and sacrilegious hands. The memorable text which asserts the unity of the THREE who bear witness in heaven is condemned by the universal silence of the orthodox fathers, ancient versions, and authentic manuscripts.

³⁰For a stimulating contemporary reflection of the significance of Gibbon's classic, see Jaroslav Pelikan's *The Excellent Empire: The Fall of Rome and the Triumph of the Church* (1987).

It was first alleged by the catholic bishops whom Hunneric summoned to the conference of Carthage. An allegorical interpretation, in the form, perhaps of a marginal note, invaded the text of the Latin Bibles, which were renewed and corrected in a dark period of ten centuries. After the invention of printing, the editors of the Greek Testament yielded to their own prejudices, or those of the times; and the pious fraud, which was embraced with equal zeal at Rome and at Geneva, has been infinitely multiplied in every country and every language of modern Europe. This example of fraud must excite suspicion; and the specious miracles by which the African Catholics have defended the truth and justice of their cause, may be ascribed, with more reason, to their industry, than to the visible protection of heaven (Gibbon 1899 vol.4:145-147 [chap. 37]).

One senses in these words the same indignation that animated Valla, Erasmus and Luther regarding the "Donation of Constantine." The sense of having found out that ecclesiastical corruption had reached as far as Scripture itself must surely have left in the minds of intelligent readers the feeling of mistrust and unease regarding the general claims of revealed religion. The logical consideration of a secular Newtonianism was one result.

And as for those who could not bear to consider such textual corruption on so sensitive and foundational a theological tenet as the Trinity, the only recourse was to challenge the claims of corruption.

George Travis, Archdeacon of Chester, took up the challenge of answering Gibbon's claims in a series of letters which appeared in the *The Gentleman's Magazine* and which were subsequently expanded into a book titled: *Letters to Edward Gibbon* (1784) This called forth one of the most extensive and acrimonious theological debates of the eighteenth century, treated briefly by McCloy (132-142). Nearly everyone who had pursued text critical studies in England at the time had something to say on the controversy. Gibbon, in his *Autobiographies* judged one response to Travis, that by Richard Porson--one of the finest minds of the day--as

the most acute and accurate piece of criticism which has appeared since the days of Bentley. His strictures are founded in argument enriched with learning, and enlivened with wit; and his adversary neither deserves nor finds any quarter at his hands. The evidence of the three heavenly witnesses would now be rejected in any court of justice: but prejudice is blind, authority is deaf, and our vulgar bibles will ever be polluted by this spurious text, '*sedet aeternumque sedebit.*' The more learned ecclesiastics will indeed have the secret satisfaction of reprobating in the closet what they read in the Church (Gibbon 1970:107).

It is of interest that Travis's early contention in the debate had to do with Erasmus as the source of this grave occasion to scepticism:

Erasmus was secretly inclined to *Arianism*: a circumstance, which rendered him by no means *an indifferent* editor of this fifth chapter of St. John. Upon the face of his own apology, then, the conduct of Erasmus in this instance was mean. Upon the supposition of his having kept back from the world his *true* motives of action, it was *grossly disingenuous* and unworthy.... If Erasmus had not possessed the merit of casting the first public imputation of imposture on this verse, which others have since been industrious to prove;-his subsequent recantation, his, "*reposuimus*," would hardly have met with so mild a rebuke from Mr. Gibbon (Travis 1794:10-11).

D. Summary

And so the debate was to be forever coloured by these considerations: the verse was omitted by those sympathetic to Arianism, so many of the orthodox would claim; and it was interpolated and fraudulently maintained by the orthodox, so the legitimate critics--the Newtonians--*and* the sceptics would claim. One could not lay a finger on this and other theologically sensitive passages, from a purely critical standpoint, without being tainted as one furthering the process of scepticism and desacralization.

Not, that is, until the establishment of the ideology of harmless engagement advocated by Bentley, a Trinitarian who would lay the foundation for retaining Trinitarianism while engaging in a critical reconstruction of the

Greek N.T. He would provide a theoretical basis for such work but would never bring such a project to life.³¹ The Germans would now pick up where Bentley left off.³²

³¹See Conyers Middleton's *Remarks Paragraph by Paragraph upon the Proposals Lately Published by Richard Bentley for a New Edition of the Greek Testament and Latin Version* 2nd ed. (1721); Richard Bentley's *Proposals for Printing a New Edition of the Greek Testament* (1721); Conyers Middleton's *Some Further Remarks* (1721). The task proved to be more daunting, perhaps, than Bentley had anticipated. Moreover, the possibility of inviting accusations of Arianism for omitting the *comma* may have also added to his final disinclination to bring the project to fruition.

³²Gibbon saw the *comma* as a kind of test for the progress of liberal and critical studies: "In 1689, the Papist Simon strove to be free; in 1707, the Protestant Mill wished to be a slave; in 1751, the Arminian Wetstein used the liberty of his times, and of his sect" (Gibbon vol. IV:146, n.).

CHAPTER SEVEN

In the Erasmian Tradition--Communicating Textual Variants *ad populum*:

Erasmus, Newton and the English Paraphrases

"There is no doubt that in spirit the Protestants, who pretend that Scripture is clear of itself, are ignorant or prejudiced. Since they have rejected the tradition of the Church and have wished to recognize no other principle of religion than this very same Scripture, they have had to make the supposition that it [the Scripture] is clear of itself and alone sufficient to establish the truth of the faith, and that independently of the tradition. But when one reflects on the conclusions that Protestants and the Socinians draw from one and the same principle, one is convinced that their principle is by no means so clear as they imagine, since these conclusions are very different, and the one set absolutely denies what the other affirms."

--Richard Simon, *Critical History of the Principal Commentators of the New Testament* 1693

We have Arians conjecturing in spite of the Trinity; and the Socinians, in a bold defiance of the atonement. We have Athanasians making reprisals on the one, and Calvinists on the other; whilst the Infidel, standing aloof from the dubious strife, is indifferent who wins, so long as religion loses the day!

--A review of William Bowyers' *Critical Conjectures and Observations on the New Testament* 3rd ed. 1782 in *The Monthly Review* 1782

A. Introduction

The model of the paraphrase was a method Erasmus had used to communicate his *philosophia Christi* to the reading public in the sixteenth century, circumventing both the medieval dogmatic tradition of Romanism, as well as the emerging dogmatic tradition of the magisterial Reformers. The seventeenth and eighteenth-century paraphrases would play a like role in fostering both a non-conformist, Erasmian religion--what Hugh Trevor-Roper broadly characterized

as Erasmian Socinianism (*Catholics, Anglicans and Puritans* 1989)--and also a new climate of religious tolerance.

If the textual variants displayed in these paraphrases--which were more likely than not also accompanied by annotations--spelled the dissolution of a sterile orthodoxy, they also invited the discovery of a new, more scientific and invigorating, Newtonian Christianity. In turn, these paraphrases were countered by orthodox churchmen producing their own editions of the Scripture in paraphrase with annotations usually defending the orthodox Christological variants. All of this activity amounted to a tacit admission that no one was now, if they ever had been, operating from a truly *sola Scriptura* hermeneutic.

I will begin by highlighting the significance of Erasmus's English paraphrases and annotations as the model for both the establishment churchmen as well as Newtonian Erasmians. I will then address the significance of the paraphrases for communicating these theologically significant variants to the educated layman, almost always, when produced by Antitrinitarians, with the ultimate *political* intention of undermining the establishment status of intolerant, Trinitarian orthodoxy.

B. The Paraphrases and Annotations

The technique of annotating the sacred text goes all the way back to the *αὐτόγραφα* when any one of the N.T. authors amended a sentence in the margin or in the text before despatching his narrative or epistle.

The medieval *Glossa Ordinaria* was an attempt to retain those qualities which had developed since the Arian controversy and the other theological skirmishes on the way to the catholic consensus of the early middle-ages, well delineated by Smalley in the following remarks:

[U]niversity men busied themselves in organizing and standardizing the teaching of Scripture itself. The unity of medieval culture is nowhere more

visible than here. The same version of the Latin Vulgate with the same standard apparatus formed the subject of statutory lectures, prepared according to the same methods, throughout Catholic Europe. We may see in this a reflection of the fact that masters and students were all clerics, belonging to the same church (CHB 2:199).

It was one of the legacies of the Reformation that this wonderful consensus—surely by modern standards—soon became nothing more than a vague memory, an era that would some day be simply known as the "Dark Ages." Moreover, the English Enlightenment served the same notice to creedal Protestantism, both conformist and non-conformist alike, that no medieval-like consensus would ever again find a place here within the now rapidly multiplying faces of Protestantism.

These medieval glosses helped to maintain the exegetical basis for medieval theology. And if Luther was correct that the Scripture is the cradle in which we find the baby Jesus, than the glosses were the hand that rocked the cradle.

Erasmus well understood that in order to place his blueprint for reform into action he had to get the content of Scripture before the average citizen, demystifying the nature of the sacred text in Latin, surrounded with arcane theological and scholastic annotations. Hence, not only was Erasmus the New Jerome when he produced a fresh and more accurate recension of Scripture founded on a Greek arch-type; he also provided a substitute for the *Glossa Ordinaria* in his own paraphrases of the Scripture with his own annotations.

While many of the Protestant Reformers preferred the term *commentarius*, Erasmus uses *Annotationes*, more in keeping with the medieval *Glossa Ordinaria* and retaining associations with the first early modern, philological approach to Latin Biblical texts, Valla's *Adnotationes* (1505, edited by Erasmus).¹ "Valla's

¹Kenneth Hagen seems to have overlooked this point in his otherwise informative essay, "What did the Term *Commentarius* Mean to Sixteenth-Century Theologians?" (1990). Cf. p. 37 where he confesses, "I could not find

notes on the Vulgate text, which show that he used at least three Greek manuscripts, are concerned with brief grammatical analysis and avoid theological interpretation" (CHB 3:80), and Erasmus,

Like Valla, to whom he often referred, gave concise interpretation of the meaning of the Greek almost verse by verse; the humanists could feel at home from the first.... And on occasion up to two pages could be given to the spiritual application of a passage by that mellow "philosophy of Christ" with which Erasmus tempered evangelical zeal (CHB 3:81).

Erasmus's paraphrases received a special place in the life of Protestant England under Edward VI's reign, although under Henry's reign it was decreed that "There shall be no Annotations or Preambles in Bibles or New Testaments in English..."² Thomas Cranmer decreed that along with the Great Bible and the *Book of Homilies*, Erasmus's paraphrases of the Gospels and Acts were required in every church. One result was that

Instead of thinking of an "Erasmian" party, we might instead want to envision a community of men with shared educational backgrounds, shared goals, and shared methodology, for which Erasmus loomed as the most articulate spokesman (Booty 1981:49).

Hence, it was only natural that his influence on first the English Reformation and post-Reformation would be significant (see McConica 1968; Todd 1987), as well as his influence on the English Enlightenment (see Trevor-Roper 1989). But little has been done in giving specific attention to the influence of his paraphrases or annotations on those English paraphrases and

any other common denominator, nor could I (as Erasmus did not [?]) differentiate between a commentary and, say, an annotation."

²*Statutes Made at Westminster*, Anno 34 & 35 Hen. VIII and Anno Dom. 1542-3, cap. I.

annotations produced on English soil, particularly after the demise of the age of Protestant orthodoxy

It is my contention that Erasmus's approach to Biblical exposition—particularly his popularizing *Paraphrases*, offered an irresistible model for those who during the English Enlightenment wanted to promulgate a simple, non-Trinitarian, and tolerant Christianity. Hence, what follows is a survey of those English paraphrases or annotations used to either raise the issue of textual variants in order to challenge the orthodoxy such variants were intended to support; and other such editions which were used to counter such attempts to undermine traditional, establishment, Trinitarian orthodoxy. In both instances nearly all would usually begin with Erasmus's data.

Little substantial work, that I have been able to discover, has been done on the English paraphrases and annotations. One helpful essay, however, that by Thomas Preston, "Biblical Criticism, Literature and the Eighteenth Century Reader" in *Books and Their Readers in Eighteenth Century England* (1982: 97-126), notes that such paraphrases and other popular commentaries were vehicles for "received interpretations." While this is undoubtedly true, one must make a distinction between *two* received traditions, antitrinitarian, as well as orthodox, since the paraphrases and annotations were one means for such popular propagandizing from both communities.

I have consulted thirty of these paraphrases and/or annotations from the 1582 Rhemes to Ostervald's *The New Testament...Illustrated with Annotations* 1795, as touching these two theological variants. What follows are the results.

1. The Geneva Bible (1560) knows of no variants at all in either case and gives full orthodox exposition to the received Trinitarian readings. Nevertheless, the accusation of Arianism was lodged against the Puritan annotators later in the seventeenth century by John Howson, who in 1619 would become Bishop of

Oxford. In 1612 he preached a sermon from St. Mary's pulpit citing several passages where the annotations broke with patristic consensus and which Howson believed would open the door to Arianism. There were, obviously, political implications to this but after reading the sermon I am convinced there is some merit to his arguments though over stated; and were no *intended* Arian sympathies on the part of the annotators (Howson 1612).³

2. The Rhemes (1582) does not even know of the Greek reading θεός at I Tim. 3:16 and as we would expect I Jn. 5:7-8 is defended as authentic, the supreme *locus classicus* for the Trinity, as the marginal note indicates: "Three persons & one substance in the B.[lessed] Trinity. Arians corrupt the text of Scripture." The annotation proper reads as follows:

Three which give testimony.] An express place for the distinction of three persons, & the unity of nature and essence in the B.[lessed] Trinity: against the Arians and other like heretics, who have in divers ages found themselves so pressed with these plain Scriptures, that they have (as it is thought) altered and corrupted the text both in Greek and Latin many ways: even as the Protestants handle those texts that make against them. But because we are not now troubled with Arianism so much as with Calvinism, we need not stand upon the variety of readings or expositions of this passage. See S. Hierom in his epistle put before the 7 Canonical or catholic Epistles.

The last reference is to a further corruption of Jerome altered to provide proof for the authenticity of the *comma*, revealed publicly by Father Richard Simon.

3. Bishop Joseph Hall, Bishop of Exeter and Norwich, an orthodox divine, in 1633 in his *A Plaine and Familiar Explication by way of Paraphrase* retains the received reading at both I Tim. 3:16 and I Jn. 5:7-8.

³Nicholas Tyacke deals briefly with this in his *Anti-Calvinists: The rise of English Arminianism c. 1590-1640* (1987:69-70).

4. John Diodati, an Italian, Reformed divine had his *Annotations* translated from the Italian into English in 1643. At I Tim 3:16 he knows of no variant and sees this as a *locus classicus* for the full deity of Christ: "*God*: namely, the everlasting Son of God, true God with his Father, hath taken upon him human nature..." For the *comma* again he knows of no variant and sees this as a proof text for the Trinity: "*that bear record*: Of the same truth by glorious effects, proper to each of the three persons of the holy Trinity...*are one*: namely, in essence and perfect operation..."

5. The 1645 edition titled simply, *Annotations Upon all the Books of the Old and New Testament* (sometimes called *The Geneva Annotations*) which was a collective effort by certain Anglican divines based upon the annotations of the Geneva Bible holds to θεός at I Tim. 3:16 and the received reading at I Jn. 5:7-8 with no discussion of variants.

6. Edward Leigh who had a seat in the Assembly of Divines in his *Annotations Upon the New Testament* (1650) does not address the variants at either I Tim. 3:16 or I Jn. 5:7-8 but assumes the received readings.

7. *The Dutch Annotations* by Theodore Haak (1657) hold to the received readings at both places, but does recognize that the Three Heavenly Witnesses "seems to have been left out of some copies by the Arrians."

8. Henry Hammond, an orthodox divine in his *Paraphrase and Annotations* (1659), affirms both received readings with no discussion regarding alternative variants.

9. Matthew Poole's *Annotations* (1685) knows only the received readings.

10. With Richard Baxter we begin to see some stirrings. His 1685 *Paraphrase on the New Testament With Notes* while affirming both received readings the Three Heavenly Witnesses are negotiable: "Note, though much of these words, ver. 7, 8 be not in many antient copies of the bible, we have more

reason to think the Arians left them out, than that the orthodox put them in;... But however, *it need not offend the faithful, there being so many other texts which assert the Trinity*" (emphasis mine).

I will now treat those non-Trinitarian paraphrases and annotations which follow after this date of 1685, as well as their orthodox opponents.

11. Le Clerc's *Supplement to Dr. Hammond's Paraphrase and Annotations* (1699). Le Clerc begins by saying that Hammond "has often acted the part of a preacher or divine, rather than an interpreter. And therefore to supply what is wanting in him, I shall subjoin here out of another English Gentleman, a discourse much more *critical* than any thing said by Dr. Hammond." He then spends nearly four pages citing from Pearson on the Apostles' Creed, where ironically, Pearson *defends* the received reading but in so doing rehearses the contrary evidence, which in the long run assists the cause of the antitrinitarians. But Le Clerc has the last word correcting even Pearson and leaving the impression that the non-orthodox reading is the oldest. Regarding I Jn. 5:7-8 Le Clerc complains that Hammond has spent too much time explaining words he ought to have first "endeavoured to shew...are genuine." He then spends five pages demonstrating the spuriousness of the passage. Le Clerc is miles ahead of his Anglican contemporaries in exercising a critical approach to the data of text criticism.

12. John Fell, an orthodox Churchman, who was both Dean of Christ Church, Oxford as well as Bishop of that city produced an edition of the Greek N.T. (1675) and was responsible for ejecting John Locke from Christ Church in 1684. In 1702—incorrectly noted in the *Cambridge History of the Bible* as 1708—a third edition of *A Paraphrase and Annotations Upon all St. Paul's Epistles* issued from the press under Dr. Fell's editorship. Originally published in 1675 anonymously by three Oxford dons, no proper annotation appears in it for I

Tim. 3:16 but a marginal note seems to acknowledge the Latin Vulgate alternative.

13. In 1703 Daniel Whitby, an Oxford-trained Postmillennialist, produced his *A Paraphrase Commentary on the New Testament* 2 vols. Whitby includes in the fourth edition (it may have appeared in an earlier edition) of this work (1718) a treatise originally published in 1710, *Examen Variantium Lectionum Johannis Millii* where he well illustrates the prevalent belief that verbal inspiration required a view of the text that held that every word was sacred and had to be defended. Hence, he argued, right on the title page, that in every instance of a textual variant the *received text* may be defended: *in iis omnibus lectionem textus defendi posse*. This well celebrated attack upon the compilation of Mill's thirty-thousand textual variants in his edition of the Greek N.T. was what prompted the debate between Bentley and Collins.

Whitby used his paraphrase as a means of attacking Papists, Calvinists and Socinians, but oddly at the end of his life he was converted to the Socinian position. His *Tractatus de vera Christi Deitate adversus Arii et Socini haereses* (1691) reveals how extensive was his knowledge of Antitrinitarian scholars in the days when he was their antagonist. Almost certainly this is a case where someone has been won over to a position in the very attempt to refute it (see his *Last Thoughts*, 1727, published posthumously "by his express order," DNB).⁴

Regarding the variants in question Whitby interacts with a good deal of material in coming to his conclusions. Regarding I Tim 3:16 he is aware of

⁴In his own words: "And this my *retraction*, or change of my opinion, after all my former endeavors to assert and establish a contrary doctrine, deserves the more to be considered, because it proceeds (and indeed can proceed) from me for no other reason, but purely from the strong and irresistible convictions, which are now upon me, that I was *mistaken*" (Whitby [1722] 1822:viii).

Grotius's arguments but defers to Pearson's reply to these, concluding: "In a word, the reading which our translation follows, is owned by all the Greek scholiasts, Chrysostom, Theodoret, Oecumenius, and Theophylact, and is found in all the manuscripts, excepting that of Clermont and Lincoln College."

Regarding the *comma* in his paraphrase Whitby gives a sound orthodox rendering: "For there are three that bear record [*to this Truth*] in [*and from*] Heaven, the Father the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one [*as in Testimony, so in Essence*]." In his annotation he says he will not comment referring his readers instead to Mill's defense and then proceeds, as though he could hardly resist, offering his response to the objections to this verse, taking up nearly two columns of folio space in the process.

Samuel Clarke's *The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity* (1712) was of some influence in bringing him to the Arian position (Whitby 1822:101) and this combined with his original treatise defending the Received Text would seem to indicate that the textual variants must have played a role in his reorientation. Nothing could be further from the truth. While his Christology became as adamantly set forth in his "*retractions*" as his former Trinitarian orthodoxy had been in nearly all his earlier writings, the sentiments he expressed in his original reply to Mill's thirty-thousand variants remained unaltered: i.e. A divinely inspired text *must* by consequence be a providentially preserved text, kept pure from all textual corruption:

Now because the end we are speaking of, is the conveyance of the knowledge of Christ's doctrine, to all those who are concerned to know it, in such a manner as they may be sufficiently certain and secure that it hath received no change or corruption from what it was when it was first delivered.... we may be fully satisfied concerning it, that it hath received *no corruption or alteration* [emphasis mine] (Whitby 1822:174).

Hence, when it came to treating I Tim 3:16 in his retractions he never questioned the orthodox reading, but instead rendered it in the following fashion:

...and as for the words in Timothy, 'God was manifest in the flesh,' it is plain that the word God, there, though it signify one who was truly God, by having a true dominion over all things in heaven and earth imparted to him, and having all perfections requisite to the exercise of that dominion, yet cannot it signify that self-existent God, whose power is absolute and underived... (Whitby 1822:124).

Whitby was one of the few Antitrinitarians never to have questioned these two famous passages while still arguing *against* Trinitarianism. This is because he felt the force of Locke's argument about the unreliability of revelation pointing to the necessary consequence of the uncertainty of dogma founded upon such a revelation; and for Whitby the exclusivity of the Christian system was paramount and could not be left vulnerable to the possibility that it was textually dubious at any point. Hence, the pristine nature of revelation must be held at all costs:

...for if it [revelation] be not certain, we cannot be assured that that doctrine which it brings down to us for the doctrine of Christ, is really such (Whitby 1822:174).

14. John Locke's *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Galatians, I and 2 Corinthians, Romans, Ephesians* (1707) while not treating either of the books containing these verses was, nevertheless, decisive in influencing the kind of exposition conducted by other non-Trinitarians who were influenced by it, such as Peirce, Benson, and Hallett. In 1702 Locke showed his work in progress to Newton who had paid Locke a visit at Oats. Locke then sent it to Newton at a later date to have a further look at it. Newton suggested an alternative interpretation at I Cor. 7:14 and other corrections. Locke did not, however, accept Newton's criticism at this point. Nevertheless, Newton was of

the opinion that Locke's "Paraphrase and Commentary on these two Epistles [I and II Cor.] is done with very great care and judgement" (Wainwright 1987 vol. I: 5). Locke possessed Erasmus's *Annotationes* and makes reference to his *Paraphrases* (87).

15. Edward Wells, a mathematician as well as yet another editor of an edition of the Greek N.T. which is found together with his paraphrase of the N.T., published in ten parts between 1709-1719, and titled: *An Help for the More Easy and Clear Understanding of the Holy Scriptures*. And then according to which section of the N.T. he would be treating in any given volume what follows would be typical: *Being All St. Paul's Epistles Paraphrased, With the Original or Greek Text Amended According to the Best MSS.* (1709). Wells is often credited with beginning the critical process in earnest because, as Metzger has noted, "Wells deserted the Elzevir text 210 times, almost always agreeing with the judgement of nineteenth century critical editors" (Metzger 1992:109). But surely Le Clerc and Locke should be given this honour as inspired by Newton's fundamentally important treatise. Their work antedated that of Wells and on truly critical dogmatic matters they were well in advance of Wells. Wells was of the opinion that Locke's *Paraphrase* "too plainly falls in with the Socinians" (Wells 1709: *preface*). Wells, however, not only does not challenge the θεός reading in his "critical" text, nor in his translation, his paraphrase of I Tim. 3:16 is an exposition of the orthodox dogma of the incarnation:

The truth I spoke of (v.15) which was hid to former ages, or not made known then so clearly as now it is...of which mysterious truth the principal articles or heads are these, viz. that God the Son, our blessed Lord, was manifested to us men by his dwelling among us in the flesh....

I believe this clearly reveals the point I have been establishing thus far: the orthodox tend to use their paraphrases to reaffirm orthodox dogma; while the Antitrinitarians' purpose is to reveal the dubious nature of such dogma by

highlighting the dubious textual evidence on which such dogma rests. Part of this process is reactionary, either in one direction or the other; either the orthodoxy reacting to the disruptive data of the antitrinitarian paraphrases, or else the antitrinitarians reacting to the lack of full disclosure of the important, doctrinally decisive textual variants in the paraphrases produced by orthodox theologians within the established church.

16. Thomas Pyle, an Arian, in his *Paraphrase with Notes on the Acts of the Apostles and Upon all the Epistles of the New Testament Being a Supplement to Dr. Clarke's Paraphrase on the Four Gospels* (1725), oddly retains θεός at I Tim. 3:16, but refers to Jesus, as was the wont of the Newtonians, as the "True Messiah" and that as "the son of God" Jesus took "upon him our human nature." Perhaps he is able to retain his Arian exposition without challenging the word "God," since Jesus is a *lesser* God in his economy. Regarding the *comma* he retains it, but refers to "three Divine Persons" without making any reference to a Trinity or of one essence, rather, his concern, like most Arians is to stress the agreement in witness.

17. Daniel Mace, an Arian, produced a critical edition of the Greek N.T. and an accompanying English translation in 1729 which has received critical praise for pushing the boundaries of text-critical development, but few seem to know his edition was produced as one means of furthering the Arian cause. A contemporary of William Whiston, his Arianism as well as his very identity was never clearly established in the various sources treating his Greek text and translation over the years because he published it anonymously. H. McLachlan has provided a very helpful correction to this (H. McLachlan 1939). Hence, he is merely referred to as a Presbyterian minister by Metzger (1964:110), though mention is made of the attack Mace received from Leonard Twells in his *A Critical Examination* (1731) as favouring Arianism in his conjectures and

emendations. Mace has θεός in his text at I Tim 3:16 and in his annotation on the place judiciously allows for Mill's judgement to pass, that though the oldest extant Greek manuscript of the day, Codex Alexandrinus, has been tampered with by "some orthodox hand," the θεός reading could be seen beneath the alteration. Nevertheless, Mace stresses Mill's puzzlement that the θεός reading had not been used in theological debates until "Gregory Nyssen, anno 380 armed himself with this text and bravely brandished it against Eunomius" (Mace 1729:773).

As for the *comma Johanneum* the story is much different. His largest annotation (fifteen pages) is reserved for this controversial passage. Moreover, the *comma* is omitted both from the text and the translation. In this rather comprehensive note all the data are amassed and dealt with from the evidence of the Greek and Latin codices, to patristic evidence, to the use of the passage by the Council of Lateran, to the pseudo-prologue ascribed to Jerome, and the verdict is: in agreement with Newton's original argument, the orthodox have expanded--and corrupted--the text of scripture to support the dogma of the Trinity. Mace was publicly opposed by Leonard Twells, a Cambridge educated Prebendary of St Paul's, London, who in his *A Critical Examination of the Late New Text and Version of the New Testament Wherein the Editor's Corrupt Text, False Version, and Fallacious Notes are Detected and Censured* (1731) opposed Mace's judgement on the *comma*. In part two of Twells' critique he notes Mace's heavy dependence on Grotius for the data in his textual annotations and spends thirty-one pages (pp. 123-154) defending the *comma*. Mace's edition is a significant example of how Arian textual scholars led the way in exposing textual fraud but were dismissed in these early attempts by Church of England divines as mere tendentious propagandists.

18. William Wall, an Oxford divine who was rector of Milton-next-Gravesend, published his *Brief Critical Notes Especially on the Various Readings of the New Testament Books* in 1730. In his preface the author acknowledges the problems that have arisen as a result of discovering textual variants in the sacred text. He attacks William Whiston in particular for suggesting that the Jews have "by compact, perverted, altered, forged, corrupted" the books of the O.T. in Hebrew (xviii). This, he fears, "and a great many other profane and unseemly words" are such that "Atheists take advantage [of], to the discrediting of the books both of the Old and New Testament; both the Jewish and Christian religion; all belief in God or in Christ." This almost prevented him from publishing "those various lections" for fear of the further use to which they might be put by sceptics. Wall fears Mr. Whiston's tendency towards primitivism:

No body suspects Mr. Whiston of any ill meaning to the Christian books; but, partly by adding and mixing some spurious ones, *which primitive Christians rejected* [emphasis mine], with true ones; and partly by breaking the connection, and widening the difference between the Old Testament books and those of the New, and inveighing with religious fury against the copies of the former which we have, he, under a disguise of strengthening, weakens the Christian cause (xxii).

Mr. Whiston's reply would no doubt be that it was only orthodox Trinitarianism that could suffer any reprisals for what the textual variants reveal.

On specific points he is particularly disturbed ("The foulest work that he has made") at Whiston's early suggestion that Matt. 1:23, a proof text for the virgin birth, is a corruption:

Now this was all that the atheistical reader wanted. Do but yield and confess, that your bible, as it now stands, is to be condemned as corrupt; and the citations out of the Old Testament in the New, inapt, impertinent, etc. and we will venture the credit of any new composition of any bible which you shall make, or amend. On this cession we may frame a book to overthrow the *grounds and reasons of Christian religion*, and get rid of both

the Testaments. This use those refiners have made of his materials, and he could not reasonably expect any better usage from men of their principles (xxix).

Coming to our two variant passages under question, Wall assumes the validity of θεός, believing the Latin Church assimilated a corruption at some stage of the transmission of the text, and refers the reader to Mill at this place. Surprisingly, however, when dealing with the *comma* Wall assumes the very posture which he has condemned in Whiston—the charge that the text of Scripture has been corrupted by means of interpolation. But in typical fashion, rather than see this alteration as a cause for reopening the discussion as to the validity of the dogma the corruption was meant to foster, he falls back on what would from this day forward be the "enlightened" adjustment to the ideology of harmless engagement, namely, the argument that "The doctrine of it is plain in other places" (374).

19. John Guyse, an independent minister, though orthodox, produced *The Practical Expositor: Or, An Exposition of the New Testament in the Form of a Paraphrase; with Occasional Notes in their Proper Places* 3 Vols. London, 1739-1752 (I had access only to a nineteenth century, sixth edition, six vols., published in Edinburgh in 1818) during the heyday of Trinitarian debates when "Arian sentiments were..revived, and zealously disseminated by Whiston, Clark, [sic] and others" (*The Life of Dr. John Guyse* as found in his *An Exposition* 1818 vol 1:ii). Guyse was an adamant Trinitarian "distinguished by the vigour of his attacks upon Arianism" (DNB). He went blind in his old age with the consequence that his preaching improved, prompting one of his parishoners to inform him that she "wished he had become blind twenty years earlier" (DNB). In his paraphrase of I Tim. 3:16 he leaves no doubt as to his understanding of the orthodox nature of this Christological passage:

And it must be confessedly owned...that the true doctrine of the gospel, which is according to godliness...is a great, glorious, and incomprehensible mystery...some of the principal articles of which are these, namely, That the eternal Son of God, who is strictly and properly God, together with the Father and Spirit, even *God over all blessed for ever*...was manifested...in his incarnate state; and so was *Immanuel, God with us* (Guyse 1818 Vol 5:167).

How all this was supposed to have been derived from the text is surely a wonder. This reveals how these "paraphrases" were intended to work for the orthodox expositors, to completely insulate the popular reading of the text from any possible non-Trinitarian rendering. Certainly no mention of any variant is to be found here. As for the *comma*, we learn from it that

there are three divine persons, the habitation of whose glory is in heaven, that bear their united testimony to the incarnate Saviour from thence. The *first* is God the Father.... The *second* is the eternal uncreated Word himself, who ever was God with the Father.... The *third* of these Heavenly witnesses is the Holy Spirit, who gave abundant attestations to our blessed Lord.... And these three heavenly witnesses, though *personally* distinct in a manner that infinitely transcends all our ideas, are *essentially* one divine being, one thing...or one God, in distinction from, and in opposition to all normal or pretended deities, which *by nature are no gods* (Guyse 1818 Vol. 6:161-162).

For a dissenting minister he shows to what extent he was, nevertheless, dependent upon catholic orthodoxy for his Trinitarian understanding. As for the matter of the textual uncertainty of the passage we learn,

It would be to little purpose to trouble the common English reader with the disputes that critics, especially of later ages, have raised about *the genuineness* of this verse. The learned may consult Mill in loc. where the Doctor gives the fullest and fairest account I have any where met with of the pleas that are urged from ancient copies, versions, and quotations, on both sides of the question; from the whole of which he concludes, that the arguments brought *for the authority of this text* seem to him strong, that it ought by no means to be dropped (ibid., 161).

20. Robert Witham's version will be a welcome relief from the point/counter-point between orthodox Protestant clergymen and antitrinitarians. Witham came from Yorkshire, descended from an important Roman Catholic

family, and was educated at the English College at Douai where he also became professor in philosophy and divinity. He eventually became its president, taking the college into near isolation. While he was President, however, Dr. Challoner was also professor and they together hatched the plan to revise the English Douai Rhemes, which when published in 1730, was called: *Annotations on the New Testament of Jesus Christ*. This edition, "differs from that of Rheims in almost every verse" (Pope 1952:347). Though we are now on fresh ground, interestingly the topic of discussion is the same: the problem of textual variants and theology. Witham in his preface draws the reader's attention to a Protestant critic's assessment of the crisis precipitated by textual variants:

A Protestant author[Gerhard v. Mæstricht]⁵...in his prologom. [to an edition of Wetstein, Amsterdam, 1711]...gives us an account of the indefatigable labours of the learned Dr. Mills.... [H]e tells us that out of about 120 MSS. he [Mill] published in 1707 [there are] above thirty thousand different readings and moreover, that the said Dr. Mill in his prologom. owns that he looks upon above two thousand of these, to be true and genuine readings, according to which all printed copies ought to be corrected, and present readings cast out, which, says he, would occasion no small changes in our books. This said critic, in the same place blames Dr. Mill for not attending to the consequences and advantages, which he apprehends the Papists may pretend to draw from thence, who always cry the foundations are corrupted; secondly the Socinians; thirdly the Atheists and all they who make a jest of all revealed Religion (Witham *preface*, no pagination).

Here we learn that not just the Englishman Whitby, but a conservative German churchman as well felt that Mill's tabulation of textual variants would be the cause inviting the desacralization of Holy Scripture. The problem is that the Protestants, according to Witham, place much too much credence in the Greek

⁵Reuss informs us that in a treatise by this author, *Specimen nova ed.* (1706), he "laid down...thirty-seven canons...for the estimation of variants, the first attempt at a theory of N.T. criticism" (Reuss 1884 vol 2:425).

text. The father of this misguided strategy and hence the source of this folly was, as we have been arguing, Erasmus:

It may be observed that neither S. Jerome, nor any of the Fathers, thought it convenient to make new translations from the Greek MSS.⁶ They contented themselves to correct those faults which inevitably happened in the manuscript copies. They had a due veneration for that version which had been made use of from the beginning of Christian Religion in all the Latin churches. Erasmus was the first who undertook a new translation from the printed Greek published by Cardinal Ximenes, and by Robert Stephens. Beza blames Erasmus for abandoning in many places the Latin Vulgate, which, says he, is more conformable to many Greek MSS. which Erasmus wanted (Witham, *preface*).

The answer to this crisis is not to endlessly pursue some fanciful ideal of a pure Greek text, because

Protestants set too great a value, and lay too much stress upon the Greek text, such as it now is, from which they have made so many different translations into vulgar language so that even Luther, Calvin, Beza, and King James the First, when he ordered a new translation made loud and just complaints that by them was shamefully corrupted the purity of the word of God (*ibid.*).

This Protestant experiment could only end in disaster, every translator...set[ting] down that reading which in his private opinion he judges best, or rather which agrees best with the principles of his sect.... that is...endeavouring to make the word of God conformable to their creed not their creed to the word of God (*ibid.*).

And here Witham sums up the legacy of the English Enlightenment.

⁶This, of course, is non-sense, since it was Jerome's original intention to produce the best recension possible from the best Greek MSS. On this see, F.C. Burkitt, *Journal of Theological Studies* 30 (1929: 412). See also J.N.D. Kelly where he informs us that "it was Damasus who requested him to sort out the multitude of discrepancies.... not a completely fresh translation of the original...but a revision based *on the original* (emphasis mine).... Among all the competing versions he [Jerome], and he alone was to determine the text which agreed most closely with the Greek" (Kelly 1975:86-87).

The orthodox Roman Catholic response to this crisis was to return to the *Vulgata Latina* as the sacred text:

I know English Protestants are apt to blame us for translating from the Latin-Vulgate, rather than from the Greek. Is not the Greek, say they, the *fountain*? Were not the *Originals* of all, or almost all the new Testament, written in Greek? They were so. But then we desire first to know where they, or we, may find this Greek fountain pure, clear, and unmixed, as it was in the beginning? Where we may be able to meet with those Original, or *αυτόγραφα*, written by those divinely inspired Authors? It is certain they are not now extant, nor have been seen or heard of for many ages.... They need not quarrel with the Decree of the Council of Trent.... [I]t belongs to the Church to judge of the sense of the Scriptures and to recommend this sacred *Depositum* to the faithful. The Church in a general Council has declared the ancient Latin-Vulgate authentic; but we do not find any Greek copy or Edition, such as we can meet with at present, recommended to us by the Church (*ibid.*).

Hence, here we find the three camps clearly delineated in a three way contrast: the Roman Catholics revering the *Vulgata Latina* as the Sacred Text; the Protestant Catholics adhering to the common *received* Greek text as Sacred Text; and the Erasmian antitrinitarians engaged in the quest for the *historical* text, repristinating a non-Trinitarian, primitive Christianity and beginning the process of desacralization in the process.

As might be expected Witham has the Latin reading "*Which*" was manifested in the flesh at 1 Tim. 3:16 in his translation. In his annotation he interprets the passage as a classic reference to the incarnation, but is happy to turn to the Greek codices for complete clarity:

A Great mystery of piety, Meaning the mystery of the incarnation of the son of God. And so in most Greek copies, and in S. Chrys. we read *God appeared in the flesh* (Witham vol. 2:264).

The *comma* is present here with the following note:

[O]ne in nature, in substance, and in all perfections, in the same sense, as when Christ himself said, John 10:30: *I and the Father are one*, or *one thing*. The Socinians object that this verse is wanting in many Greek MSS. And

even Erasmus in one edition [actually it was two, the first two] and Mnsr. Simon in his *Critics*, have questioned it, or rejected it, as a false reading, but without any sufficient proofs and grounds, as hath been shewn by many learned Catholics, and also by Protestant writers, who receive in their translations this verse as *Canonical* (*Ibid.* 431).

21. William Whiston published his own annotations in his *Primitive New Testament* in 1745. A thorough-going Newtonian, he followed his mentor as Lucasian Professor and was a Boyle Lecturer. Earlier he had published his *Primitive Christianity Revived* (1711). In this most advanced critical recension Whiston leaves out the ascension at Lk. 24:51, as well as the act of worshipping Jesus by the Apostolic community in the following verse. At I Tim. 3:16 he reads "who" rather than "God." At I John 5, verses 7 and 8 are nowhere to be found as the numbering goes from 5 to 9. Whiston theorises that "the old Heretics, the followers of Simon Magus, frequently interpolated the copies of the books of the New Testament; which they put into the hands of the Catholic Christians, in order to confound them. And *that* by consequence, Beza's double copy [Codex Bezae, or "D"], which is far more ancient than any of the rest, and I think, written at the latest within 30 years of the death of John the Apostle, must be much more uncorrupted and free from such interpolations than the later copies can be supposed to be" (appendix:1). Here we see the complete congruity between the primitivists' impulse to get behind late institutional orthodoxy and the inclination to accept only the verdict arising from the earliest MS sources for the biblical documents, one of the foundational principles of modern textual criticism.

Interestingly, Whiston offers a passing comment about Wall's annotations:

As to the numerous mistakes in our modern copies, both of the Old and New Testament, we have a very large catalogue of them from that eminent, sagacious, and very good man, Dr. Wall, in his *Critical Notes upon the Old and New Testament*: though even he could never be made sensible of what I have plainly proved elsewhere, that many of those mistakes were voluntary,

and made either by the wicked Jews...or by the old wicked heretics...who made it their business to forge spurious books, or interpolate the genuine true ones (appendix:15).

And finally, to answer Wall's fears as to where the variants must tend:

And thus by my observation it has ever been, and will ever be with the most formidable objections against the primitive Christian religion, that they still occasion such deeper enquiries as at length will silence, I wish I could add also, and convert those sceptics which propose them, to the same primitive Christianity. Amen. Amen (16).

This sentiment epitomises the optimism shared both by rational apologetes for classical orthodoxy as well as antitrinitarian Newtonians.

22. George Benson, a dissenting Arian pastor in his *A Paraphrase and Notes on Paul's Epistles* (1752 2nd. ed.)—and based on Locke's method—leaves out the received orthodox reading at I Tim 3:16 in his paraphrase while retaining it in his text. He is convinced that θεός is a corruption because, "Our Saviour, Jesus Christ, himself, hath informed us, that *his father is the only true God....* Now the *Father* was never said to be manifest in the flesh.—That, therefore, would make one doubt of the common reading and interpretation" (272).

23. John Wesley produced his *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* in 1754. He states as one of his principles that

those various readings likewise which he [Bengel] has showed to have a vast majority of ancient copies and translations on their side, I have without scruple incorporated with the text (*preface*).

Here he follows the lead of his guide, Bengel, after whose edition of the Greek N.T. Wesley produced his own English translation (1790). Wesley's *conservatism* as expressed here matches his Anglican, catholic instincts, while his *independence* from that tradition is manifest in his attempt to produce a rival translation to that of the established Church--perhaps the two factors that best sum up the very essence of Wesley's reform movement. He assumes the validity

of θεός at I Tim. 3:16 and exegetes the passage as a proof of the orthodox view of the incarnation:

"The mystery of godliness--Afterwards specified in six articles, which sum up the whole economy of Christ upon earth. Is the pillar and ground--The foundation and support of all truth taught in his church. God manifest in the flesh-- In the form of a servant, the fashion of a man, for three and thirty years.

He fully accepts the *comma* and sees the unity of the three heavenly witnesses as "one in essence, in knowledge, in will, and in their testimony."

Moreover, in a sermon he preached in Cork on 8 May, 1775 (sermon 55), titled: "On the Trinity," he used as his sermon text the *comma Johanneum*. In this sermon he addresses the issue of what constitutes a *fundamental* of the faith and asserts

there have been so many warm disputes about the number of *fundamentals*. But surely there are some which it nearly⁷ concerns us to know, as having a close connexion with vital religion. And doubtless we may rank among these that contained in the words above cited: "There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: And these three are one."

Hence, for Wesley, the truth of the Trinity is beyond dispute because of the clear teaching of this passage. The Trinity is, for him, a fundamental of the Faith, even if we need not demand the use of classic terms such as *Trinity* or *Person*:

I dare not insist upon any one's using the word Trinity, or Person. I use them myself without any scruple, because I know of none better: But if any man has any scruple concerning them, who shall constrain him to use them?

⁷ I originally put a question here as to whether or not this should be "*dearly* concerns us" rather than *nearly*. He promptly informed me that the answer was no and that I should consult the *Oxford English Dictionary*. The experience leaves one with a clear example of why conjectural emendation is always a hazardous enterprise.

I cannot: Much less would I burn a man alive, and that with moist, green wood, for saying, "Though I believe the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God; yet I scruple using the words *Trinity* and *Persons*, because I do not find those terms in the Bible." These are the words which merciful John Calvin cites as wrote by Servetus in a letter to himself. I would insist only on the direct words, unexplained, just as they lie in the text: "There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: And these three are one."

Yet, later in the sermon he raises the issue--as did nearly all the non-Trinitarian expositors--of the *authenticity* of this passage on which rests the teaching of the Trinity as a *fundamental* dogma of the Christian Faith:

"As they lie in the text:"--But here arises a question: Is that text genuine? Was it originally written by the Apostle, or inserted in later ages? Many have doubted of this; and, in particular, that great light of the Christian Church, lately removed to the Church above, Bengelius,--the most pious, the most judicious, and the most laborious, of all the modern Commentators on the New Testament. For sometime he stood in doubt of its authenticity, because it is wanting in many of the ancient copies. But his doubts were removed by three considerations: (1) That though it is wanting in many copies, yet it is found in more; and those copies of the greatest authority:--(2) That it is cited by a whole train of ancient writers, from the time of St. John to that of Constantine. This argument is conclusive: For they could not have cited it, had it not then been in the sacred canon:--(3) That we can easily account for its being, after that time, wanting in many copies, when we remember that Constantine's successor was a zealous Arian, who used every means to promote his bad cause, to spread Arianism throughout the empire; in particular, the erasing [of] this text out of as many copies as fell into his hands. And he so far prevailed, that the age in which he lived is commonly styled, *Seculum Arianum*,--"the Arian age;" there being then only one eminent man who opposed him at the peril of his life. So that it was a proverb, *Athanasius contra mundum*: "Athanasius against the world" (Wesley Works 3rd. ed. 1820 Vol. 6:200-201).

This is a classic model of how the orthodox swept aside all the critical efforts of antitrinitarians to push not only for an historically more accurate form of the N.T. text, but also for the realignment of theology to reflect the teaching of a more faithful recension. Wesley states ahead of time, before making any reference to Biblical evidence, that the Trinity is a *fundamental* of the faith; he

then cites the *comma* as evidence to support what has already been asserted; he then replies to the evidence against the authenticity of this passage of Scripture by summoning Bengel, whose orthodoxy and *piety* matches his own and that of his Methodist constituency. Finally, he suggests the scenario that nearly all orthodox divines invoked: the passage was excised by the Arians in the fourth century, thus leaving the inevitable conclusion to be drawn that those who wished the removal of the text now must be doing so because, they, too, are heirs of Arius and wish it removed from mere prejudice.

What he has failed to address, and what would have been clear as day to contemporary antitrinitarian scholars was Wesley's own tendentious treatment by (1): assuming the doctrine to be true without first determining it to be so from Biblical evidence; (2) the invoking of Biblical evidence to substantiate the *already* affirmed dogma, without first determining the validity of that textual evidence; (3) his then arguing in favour of the textual evidence by reference to one orthodox divine, without ever addressing Newton's treatise, which appeared in 1754, nor the arguments of Wettstein, who answered Bengel in a decisive way in 1752. Finally, (4) the use of guilt by association to taint anyone who might attempt to raise the evidence against the *comma* as doing so for purely prejudicial reasons--because they are "Arian."

24. Philip Doddridge, a non-conformist tolerant toward Arians but not one himself, produced his immensely popular *The Family Expositor or a Paraphrase and Version of the New Testament with Critical Notes*, 6 vols. published from 1738-56, the last appearing posthumously.⁸ He was influenced by John Le Clerc

⁸I fear I must take issue with Malcolm Deacon when he says that "Doddridge's translation of the New Testament from the original Greek, juxtaposing the four Gospels with commentaries and devotional exercises, was the first work of its kind designed to give to the public an opportunity of studying the scriptures with open and alert minds" (Deacon 1980:106). It could

particularly on his modification of the verbal view of inspiration. Regarding I Tim. 3:16, Doddridge surely must have known the controversy surrounding this variant but not a word is found here to that end. Typically he finds here a proof text for the incarnation: "*God was manifested in the flesh*: of our blessed Redeemer, in whose human nature the incarnate Deity dwelt." On the *comma* he places the passage in brackets with the following accompanying note:

As it would be altogether unfit, to introduce into such a short *Notes* as these are intended to be, a *critical* dissertation upon the authority of this *celebrated Text*; I shall content myself with referring to what so many learned persons as have engaged in the controversy, have written on each side: but I thought myself obliged to intimate such a remaining doubt at least, concerning its authenticity, as I have done by inclosing it in crotchets. I am persuaded the words contain an important truth; but whether they have been added by some, or omitted by others, contrary to the *original copy*, I will not pretend to determine.

25. Robert Goadby, yet another Arian,⁹ rejected θεός in his annotation at I Tim. 3:16 while retaining the reading in his text in his *An Illustration of the New Testament by Notes and Explications* (1759), relying on the evidence provided by Mill:

GOD was manifest in the flesh:] There is great reason to suppose that this is not the antient and true reading, because all the antient interpreters, the *Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Ambrosius*, all appear to have read it not *GOD was manifest*, but *WHICH was manifest*, viz. *the Mystery of Godliness*, or the Gospel....

be argued that each of the already listed twenty-one earlier attempts to popularise biblical content had all in their own way anticipated Doddridge's effort.

⁹I have determined this based on his exposition of John's *prologue*, always a safe source for such a determination if sufficient information is provided in the annotation. Goadby is wont to write at great length in his annotations as opposed to those who offer just the briefest of comments.

Some think it should read, HE THAT *was manifest in the flesh*, viz. that Person who is called in the beginning of *St. John's* Gospel, God... Our LORD *JESUS CHRIST* hath himself informed us, that *his Father is the only True God*, John xvii.... Now the FATHER was never said to be *manifest in the flesh*; THAT, therefore, would make one doubt of the common Reading and Interpretation. And what increaseth the suspicion is, that for three hundred and eighty years after *Christianity* was planted, this text was never alleged to prove the Divinity of Christ (Goadby 1759:753).

And hereafter he gives the data found in Mill. Wonderfully typical of nearly all other Arians consulted thus far, Goadby fits the pattern perfectly in his rejection of this passage because it lacked early attestation and because its theology did not fit that of the pre-Nicene Church.

As for the *comma Johanneum* Goadby begins by offering a non-orthodox exposition—one could say an Erasmian interpretation, since Erasmus himself understood it as does Goadby—before rejecting it as an interpolation¹⁰:

That is, One in consent of testimony; or they all agree in bearing the same testimony; for it is of a record or testimony that *St. John* is here speaking. And *to be one*, John xvii. 21. evidently signifies, to be one in consent or agreement, and not an unity of nature....

Now comes the well expected language: "But there are the strongest reasons to conclude, that"

these words... were added some hundreds of years after *St. John's* death; for they are not to be found in the text of any *Greek* manuscript, before the invention of printing, or before the sixteenth century; nor in the text of any antient version except the *Latin*, and that, only in some Manuscripts; nor cited by any of the antient *Christian* writers (Goadby:902).

He then rehearses what may have by then become a forgotten fact: *Erasmus* first left it out in both his first and second editions of his Greek N.T. and did

¹⁰It is true that both Calvin and Beza interpreted the text in the way that Goadby does but when I say "orthodox" I generally mean orthodoxy as defined by the Protestant dogmaticians of the seventeenth century.

not place it in the proper *Greek* text until his third, 1522 edition.¹¹ Hence, Goadby rightly sees Erasmus as the progenitor of a critical text which became overlaid by later Protestant orthodoxy, just as early medieval Christianity had overlaid an earlier recension of the Latin Bible with the same interpolation.

26. Anthony Purver, a Quaker and a self-taught man, produced his *A New and Literal Translation of all the Books of the Old and New Testament with Notes Critical and Explanatory* 2 vols. in 1764. Under his heading, "Additional Remarks" he addresses the issue of textual variants and inspiration: "If we confess that the Scripture was given by Divine inspiration, as we must if we believe what it says 2 Tim. 3:16. there can scarce, one might think, be denied to it the lesser regard of Providence for its preservation...". He, nevertheless, notes that there are variants, far fewer in the Hebrew O.T. manuscripts than in the Greek N.T., because, "the *old Law* lying in the letter, required an exactness there, which the *new* being spiritual does not require; though the latter has it sufficiently in what is material..."). He retains θεός at I Tim 3:16 but does acknowledge the Latin alternative. Regarding the *comma* he knows Mill's arguments in its favour but notes Le Clerc's treatment in thinking it to have been a late interpolation. Purver simply makes no judgement, no doubt feeling out of his depth. Also, however, he might have been a bit reticent for other reasons. In his introductory material he remarked: "As there is an established and received English Version of the Scripture, whoever makes another, seems under some necessity to give his reasons for the principal alterations at least, to satisfy

¹¹He even makes the interesting point that earlier English translations placed the verse in question in italics "to signify its being wanting in the original: which distinction came afterwards to be neglected" (902). This signifies the progressive nature and ultimate dominance of seventeenth century orthodoxy on this point.

the public, as they did himself." For a dissenting Quaker to be challenging orthodox variants would have possibly lead to a cloud of suspicion hanging over his translation.

27. John Worsley, yet another dissenter, produced his *The New Testament or New Covenant of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ Translated from the Greek According to the Present Idiom of the English Tongue with notes and Reference*, 1770. Worsley admitted in his introductory material that while he knew his translation could not legally be employed as a substitute for the established church Bible, nevertheless, he hoped "some *private* persons may receive benefit by that which is now offered." Also, he notes that he has supplied alternate variant readings in his notes by use of the abbreviation *Al.* for *aliter*. He has nothing to say about I Tim. 3:16, but in his note on I Jn. 5:7-8 uses this notation to explain why he has omitted from the text the *comma*.

28. In 1776 Edward Harwood produced his *The New Testament Collated with the Most Approved Manuscripts with Select Notes in English Critical and Explanatory* 2 vols. 1776. Harwood was an Arian and his critical edition of the N.T. ranks as one of the more high-profile attempts to communicate the falsity of the established church edition used to maintain Trinitarianism. He used both Codices Bezae and Claromontanus, both of which he was convinced were very close indeed to the original transcripts of the N.T. books (other Arians/Unitarians who also worked on the text of the N.T. were of this conviction). Thus he could with some degree of confidence maintain that "the text of the inspired writers here exhibited will approve itself to every scholar who is a judge of sacred criticism, to be as near to the original autograph of the Evangelists and Apostles as any hitherto published to the world." Moreover, he could in good conscience assert: "The world never laid me under any obligations to espouse any party, or to vindicate any set opinions."

Harwood subsequently received approbation for his efforts from both Michaelis and Marsh, thus advancing the cause of furthering a critical approach to the text of the N.T. Hence, he could with some pride announce to the world in his *Introduction* (noted below) that "Learning hath *revived*, and, probably, in subsequent ages will eminently *flourish*, among the *Protestant Dissenters*, since the institution of those excellent seminaries in *London, Daventry, Warrington, Exeter, and Caermarthen*, superintended and conducted by persons who have made singular attainments in all the branches of polite and useful science." In addition to this Greek text, Harwood also produced a more popular *A Liberal Translation of the New Testament* 2 vols. 1767 and in his *A New Introduction to the Study and Knowledge of the New Testament* 2 vols. 1767-1771, he lists the sometimes extensive arguments for why he altered the *received text* to bring it into line with earlier witnesses. This last work was translated into German and no doubt forms one more link of dependence of nineteenth century German scholarship on the ground-breaking work of the eighteenth century English antitrinitarians. At I Tim 3:16, as we might expect, Harwood has \acute{o} rather than $\theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$. And the *comma* is simply omitted with no comment. Harwood knew Newton's treatise, noting it in his appendix as "an extremely curious and most excellent pamphlet."

29. Zachary Pearce, a friend of Isaac Newton, had his *Commentary with Notes on the Four Evangelists and the Acts of the Apostles*, 2 vols. posthumously published in 1777 by John Derby. While Pearce does not treat the two passages under investigation here, there is in this work an interesting personal account related by the author of a visit by him to Isaac Newton's home where a discussion was held regarding the publishing of Newton's famous "Chronology." Moreover, throughout his annotations Pearce shows his willingness to accept the judgement of Grotius, Le Clerc and others when they judge, on the basis of

conjecture alone, that certain of the received readings were later interpolations (Matt. 1:8; Luke 23:33; Jn. 6:4; Jn 19:31).

30. John F. Ostervald, a Swiss clergyman influenced both by the Enlightenment and Pietism had his *The New Testament...Illustrated with Annotations* translated into English in 1795. A derivative work, he synthesised the comments from at least sixteen other prominent English commentators/annotators. He refers to Samuel Clarke's comments on I Tim. 3:16 with no reference at all to the variants here. For the *comma* he accepts it as authentic--"not only agreeing in testimony, as ver. 8 but in *unity of nature*"--and in a completely uninformed way goes on to comment: "Though this passage has, by carelessness or design, been left out of some copies, yet it is sufficiently demonstrated, by many of the most ancient ones, that it belonged originally to the sacred text."

Thomas Emlyn, who for the heresy of Arianism was sent to prison from 14 June 1703 to the 21 July 1705, found the retaining of the *comma Johanneum* in the established church Bible to be one of the root causes of intolerance toward antitrinitarians in England. In the words of his biography, written by his son, he complained in vain:

There were two particulars so generally allowed to be wrong, and yet no public attempts to amend them, that it made our author quite despair of ever seeing any thing rectified, be it never so plainly amiss. These were the Athanasian Creed and the supposed text of I John 5:7 (Emlyn 1746 Vol. 1:lviii).

Even among the reasonably disposed within the ranks of the established church, who were ready to recognize the spurious nature of the *comma* Emlyn discovered

These men do indeed confess that the text ought to be given up, as past all just defence; but 'tis very wrong to say, 'tis enough that a few learned men know it. The Bible is a *public* book, for the use of all, and is translated for

the use of the unlearned; and for their good it should be set out free from all known corruptions. And the learned, who know this *text* is to be given up, should honestly let the world know it too, who are as much concerned as they. But 'tis never *given up* fairly, till it be left out of our printed copies; nor is it declared to be *dubious*, till it be again marked in small letters.... But alas! 'tis vain to say 'tis given up, while 'tis read undistinguished in the church, and urged from the pulpit, in proof of a *fundamental* point of religion: *and while commentators still deliver it as their opinion that 'tis genuine, and according to the true* original of St. John (emphasis mine) (Emlyn 1746 Vol. II:163).

It was, indeed, as I have demonstrated with the former survey, among the various annotators and paraphrases of the Bible during the eighteenth century, that the debate was carried on in earnest, as Emlyn is careful to note (using Wells's annotations as a specific example).¹² It was here that the antitrinitarians were able to alert the public to the status of the evidence surrounding the *comma* and here where the established church commentators had to wage their final Biblical defense for both the *comma* and Trinitarianism.

C. Summary

In Newton's two textual studies he was significantly indebted to the data in Erasmus's *Annotationes*; in his playing out of the drama involved in bringing these scriptural corruptions to the attention of the learned world, he was continuing the plea for tolerance and reflection that was so much a part of the legacy of Erasmus. If Erasmus had liberated the Church from medieval corruptions, Newton and the Newtonians saw themselves in a similar role, liberating Protestantism from the textual corruptions of Trinitarianism. Because of the stature that Newton held during the English Enlightenment the *Two Notable Corruptions* was the most important contribution to this process in the

¹² "Which Dr. Wells, tho without answering the arguments against it, and therefore without just reason, has not feared to do [defend the *comma*], in his late Exposition of this epistle" (163).

eighteenth century. The paraphrases and annotations became the most popular way of communicating these variants and their significance, *ad populum*.¹³

¹³ Interestingly, Christopher Hill's recent rather monumental work covering much of the same period as this chapter, *The English Bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolutions* (1993), though rightly recognizing that "Failure to prevent continuing discussion by the middling and lower classes, to which the survival of dissent testified, was perhaps as important in preparing the intellectual climate of the Industrial Revolution as the political changes and liberation of the revolutionary decades" (432), nevertheless shows no recognition of the role played by the paraphrases/annotations as contributing factors, both to the encouragement of dissent as well as to popular scepticism.

CHAPTER EIGHT

From Lower Criticism to Higher Criticism: Joseph Priestley and the Use of Conjectural Emendation in an Early Quest for the Historical Jesus

Meanwhile the industry of the more unprejudiced scholars was applied the more zealously to the increase and sifting of the critical apparatus. It was no disadvantage whatever that the prevailing prejudice [in the 17th/18th centuries] hindered the more frequent transformations of the text, for they were yet always too hasty; it was thus possible to collect and store up, with more time and care, the treasures with which a freer century, in fresh power, might begin a more enduring work.... Here again it was the English who led the way, to the horror of all who clung to custom, but unfortunately too soon and ungraciously forgotten by those who came after them. Several even then hit upon the idea of interrogating the oldest witnesses alone, paying no attention to others. Some, however, continued their researches and the announcement of their results, and found, instead of sober judgement and due acknowledgment, only clamour and suspicion.

--Eduard Wilhelm Eugen Reuss, *History of the Sacred Scriptures of the New Testament* 5th ed., 1884, pp.423-424;426.

Everything which I deem to be a corruption of Christianity has been a departure from the original scheme, or an innovation.... And if I have succeeded in this investigation, this historical method will be found to be one of the most satisfactory modes of argumentation in order to prove that what I object to is really a corruption of genuine Christianity and no part of the original scheme

--Joseph Priestley, *An History of the Corruptions of Christianity* 2 vols. 1782, vol. 1 xiv.

A. Introduction

Henning Graf Reventlow, in his close study of the impact of biblical criticism in the early modern period, has rightly turned our attention away from

nineteenth-century Germany to eighteenth-century Britain (Reventlow 1985). Moreover, he sees Erasmus as perhaps the real progenitor of what would become the thoroughly modern approach to reading the Bible (39-48). On both these points, as I have been arguing throughout, I think he is correct. One of his themes is that eighteenth-century English Deism--in some important respects affected by Erasmian lower criticism--did much to awaken nineteenth-century Germans from their dogmatic slumber:

The direct influences of English Deism on the German Enlightenment...are great, especially since the German Enlightenment differed from that in France by sharing the same basically apologetic position as English Deism.... [W]e cannot overestimate the influence exercised by Deistic thought, and by the principles of the Humanist world-view which the Deists made the criterion of their biblical criticism, on the historical-critical exegesis of the nineteenth century (Reventlow 1985:412).

My interest, however, has been to highlight the unique contribution of yet another dissenting English community--also influenced by Erasmian text criticism--namely, eighteenth-century antitrinitarian pioneers of Biblical criticism, of which the scientist-historian, Joseph Priestley, following the career of Isaac Newton, was perhaps the most important example.

Not only was it the Deists who influenced the Germans, but the more moderate English Unitarians, were often more serious Biblical critics. Consequently, not only did the Unitarians pave the way for the Germans in many respects, they were also the most responsive when the nineteenth-century flow of influence changed direction from Germany back to Britain. Dodd rightly assessed this:

[A]s James Martineau noted, the Unitarians were the only Dissenters who could produce a "class of fearless investigators and earnest reformers in Morals and Religion." That the first work on Strauss in England was connected with Unitarians and with those in touch with a Unitarian tradition of untrammelled inquiry bears witness to the intellectual vigor of the sect (Dodd 1981:434).

Patrick Lambe brought to our attention in his *Harvard Theological Review* essay of 1988, the impact of the popular press on the seventeenth-century

republic of letters in Europe. This popular press made a significant impact in communicating the data of biblical criticism to the reading public. One of the results was the emergence of the popular sceptic alongside the serious critic.

This popular press had much to do with the success of the Deists in communicating their profound scepticism about revealed religion to the learned classes as well as to the masses. Priestley, though an Antitrinitarian, does *not* belong to this sceptical class. He was a most devout believer in revealed religion. In his memoirs he confessed:

But I hope that my always avowing myself a Christian, and holding myself ready on all occasions to defend the genuine principles of it, was not without its use. Having conversed so much with unbelievers, at home and abroad, I thought I should be able to combat their prejudices with some advantage, and with this view I wrote, while I was with Lord Shelburne, the first part of my "Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever," proof of the doctrines of a God and a providence, and to this I have added during my residence at Birmingham, a second part, in defense of the evidences of Christianity.... I can truly say, that the greatest satisfaction I receive from the success of my philosophical pursuits, arises from the weight it may give to my attempts to defend Christianity, and to free it from those corruptions which prevent its reception with philosophical and thinking persons... (Priestley 1809:67).

His view of the Christian faith was well summed-up by his most recent biographer:

...Priestley wished to make it clear that it was only simple Christianity he was defending, for the corruptions were hindrances. The principal corruptions were 'a trinity of persons in the godhead, original sin, arbitrary predestination, atonement for the sins of men by the death of Christ, and (which has perhaps been as great a cause of infidelity as any other) the doctrine of the plenary inspiration of the scriptures.' What therefore did Priestley suppose Christian faith to be? His answer is, 'a belief of all the great historical facts recorded in the Old and New Testament, in which we are informed of the creation and government of the world, the history of the discourses, miracles, death and resurrection of Christ, and his assurance of the resurrection of all the dead to a future life of retribution; and this is the doctrine that is of the most consequence, to enforce the good conduct of men (Holt:140)¹

¹These points are principally drawn from Priestley's *Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever, containing an Examination of the principal Objections to the Doctrine of Natural Religion, and especially those contained in the writings of Mr. Hume. Also, a State of the Evidence of Revealed Religion, with animadversions on the*

As a good scientist Priestley embodied a radical historical consciousness which pushed him to place Christianity on the firmest historical ground possible (e.g. his *Institutes of Natural and Revealed Religion*, first published in 1772 and his *Discourses Relating to Evidences of Revealed Religion* 1796).² It is, therefore, his contribution as a committed believer, to the development of an early quest for the *historical* Jesus, that I treat in this study.

It is recorded that on a certain day the orthodox bishop, Samuel Horsley, met the freethinker physician, Monsey, in the park: "These are dreadful times!" commented the bishop. "Not only do Deists abound, but, would you think it

two last chapters of the first volume of Mr. Gibbon's History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire; and an Answer to the Letters of Mr. William Hammon 2 vols. (1780).

²I find it therefore quizzical that Ann Holt should suggest that Priestley in his *History of the Corruptions of Christianity* (1782), "scandalizes the modern historian, for he had made up his mind already as to what were the corruptions. He did not read his authorities and then come to conclusions; he first of all arrived at his conclusions and then read his authorities for support" (Holt 1931:133-134). But she herself acknowledged that Priestley originally held to the virgin birth and that only after "collecting material for the *Early Opinions* [1786] that he came to disbelieve the doctrine of the miraculous conception" (138). So what merits the statement: "Had he found the evidence he collected contrary to his belief in the humanity of Christ, he would have rejected it as he had his faith in orthodoxy" (Holt:138)? Her criticism is damning beyond repair for Priestley's reputation. She never seems to have addressed the question as to why and how he *did* arrive at his conclusions particularly when they entailed his altering his opinion on something as significant as the virgin birth. This would seem to suggest that perhaps her mind was made up before hand. As a scientist Priestley understood the principle of axioms. Once one has discovered an axiom one no longer seeks to disprove it but to draw as many conclusions from it as the evidence will suggest. How he arrived at his axiomatic certainty on various points is what should be treated. This I will attempt to do in what follows, particularly as it concerns the virgin birth.

Doctor--some people deny that there is a *God!*" "I can tell you", replied the Doctor, "what is equally strange--some people believe that there are *three*" (Holt 1931:136).³ Such was the common theological discourse in Priestley's age.

Priestley was not, however, born into the Unitarian tradition. While his parents were non-conformists, they held to typical eighteenth century, orthodox English Presbyterianism. Nevertheless, they shared in common with other dissenting religious bodies, the ignominy of abiding under the marginalizing *Test Act*, passed in 1673 and not repealed until 1828. Like the *Act of Uniformity* (1559) which demanded whole-hearted and exclusive subscription to the prayer-book in public worship, the *Test Act* was originally intended to exclude Roman Catholics from the public institutions of the state, church, university and government. It, nevertheless, had its effect on those Protestants who were non-conformists.

Priestley was the eldest of six children and his father was a tradesman working in cloth who employed a few others in producing the popular homespun. Priestley learned to repeat the Westminster Catechism by the age of four and because he was a sickly child he soon learned the friendship of books. This suited his parents who aspired to enlist their eldest son in the ministry.

As non-conformists, excluded from both Oxford and Cambridge, they sent young Joseph off to the new dissenting academy at Daventry, Northamptonshire.⁴ To prepare himself beforehand young Priestley sat at the

³On Horsley, one of Priestley's many opponents, see F.C. Mather, *High Church Prophet: Bishop Samuel Horsley (1733-1806) and the Caroline Tradition in the Later Georgian Church* (1992).

⁴On the significance and place of this academy, and others amongst the non-conformists see McLachlan's *English Education Under the Test Acts: Being the History of the Non-Conformist Academies 1662-1820* (1931), and the earlier and

feet of a local dissenting minister who instructed him in Hebrew, Chaldee, Syriac and Arabic. Having early picked up the habit of studying on his own, he found the Academy's curriculum insufficient for his purposes and so supplemented it with his own independent readings in history, philosophy, science, as well as, producing daily some ten folio pages of Greek translation.

All of these ingredients put him at a disadvantage once he entered the Presbyterian pastorate in 1755--his congregation soon detected that they had a "Free-Thinker" on their hands. Priestley would soon find the orthodox view of the Atonement unsatisfying and some of Paul's arguments illogical. Because of conversations he had with John Walker (1719-1805), and other Baxterians, by the age of eighteen he was no longer a Calvinist, but an Arminian. When he attempted to gain membership in his home church he was rejected because he confessed feeling no guilt for Adam's sin.

While at the academy he was taught by the son of the celebrated Arian, Samuel Clarke (1624-1750), a former close associate of Isaac Newton. It was under his tutelage that Priestley then moved from Arminianism to Arianism.

Because of a speech defect and his unabashed Arianism he left his pastorate in 1761. In that year he became tutor of languages at the then newly founded dissenting Academy at Warrington. In 1767, he then took another ministerial post at Mill Hill Chapel in Leeds and it was here that Priestley's Christological views finally came to rest. A thorough reading of Nathaniel Lardner's *Letter on the Logos* (1759, but written thirty years earlier), an anti-Arian treatise written

briefly, I. Parker, *Dissenting Academies in England: Their Rise and Progress and their place among the Educational Systems of the Country* (1914).

from a Socinian perspective, finally provided Priestley with what would be the bedrock of his theology--Unitarianism.

What allowed Priestley to so freely evolve to his final position was not just the obviously keen intellect which he possessed. It was this, combined, however, with the circumstances involved in growing up in a dissenting, non-conformist environment. Furthermore, he was a student of Locke and the Deist, Anthony Collins. One provided him with the new hermeneutic of reasonableness and the other provided him with, among other things, evidence and arguments that exposed the traditionally received view of verbal inspiration to the light of an unrestrained examination of the phenomena of the Biblical documents themselves.

All of this impelled Priestley to the same project that animated many of the Christian humanists during the Renaissance and the Newtonians during the English Enlightenment. Erasmus had taught that Christianity had to be reinvented (or, *recovered* might be the better word) calling on the early fathers and ancient classical wisdom for clues as to how this should be done. A restorationist optimism for recapturing a *primitive, simple* and *tolerant* Christianity provided a high motivation, both in the sixteenth-century as well as among many of the non-conformists of the eighteenth-century.⁵ As Erasmus was the most gifted of the former age, Priestley may well have been of the latter.

Not everyone appreciated Priestley's Christianity because it came with no creed and a radical political vision. If Anglicanism represented a lingering corruption of Christianity, as Priestley had proved to his own satisfaction in his

⁵On Erasmus's humanistic primitivism see P. Joachimsen, "Humanism and the Development of the German Mind" (1972); F. H. Littell, *The Origins of Sectarian Protestantism* (1964), and C. M. N. Eire, *War Against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (1986).

magnum opus: A History of the Corruptions of Christianity (1782), the State that sponsored this was equally to blame. The social democratic impulse of the French Revolution found a warm advocate in Priestley. It was this dimension of Priestley's theology that most insulted Edmund Burke. In Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, he referred to Priestley's threat to "King and Church," grouping him with the French Republicans, who had, in fact, conferred on Priestley French Citizenship in 1792. Burke could not tolerate the fact that Priestley had boasted himself "a Citizen of that Republick of Robbers and assassins" and characterized him in the following terms:

A man amongst them [Priestley] of great authority, and certainly of great talents, speaking of a supposed alliance between church and state says, "perhaps *we must wait for the fall of the civil powers* before this most unnatural alliance be broken. Calamitous no doubt will that time be. But what convulsion in the political world ought to be a subject of lamentation, if it be attended with so desirable an effect?" You see with what a steady eye these gentlemen are prepared to view the greatest calamities which can befall their country! (Burke 1989:108).

It was Burke's rhetoric combined with a natural animosity that drove a drunken mob to the Priestley home in the early hours of 15 July, 1791. The Priestleys having been forewarned were able to leave just hours before. Nearby

dimly across that distance [Priestley] could hear the roar of wild voices and the rude shattering blows that a fierce mob were showering upon the walls and crash of falling masonry. He knew that in those moments, the treasures that he had gathered around him in all those years, including those unique scientific instruments that had made his name a household word throughout the world, were all at the mercy of a gang of ruffians and were being destroyed beyond possible recovery. And what he valued much more than his scientific instruments--his manuscript writing on religion and in particular a series of notes on the whole of the New Testament, which in five days time would have been completed and ready for the press, were left to the tender mercies of this fanatical riotery (Allen 1932:122-123).

A contemporary who stood at Priestley's side while this took place related that he showed no sign of anger and "in this hour of anguish displayed a solemnity of demeanour that she had never seen in him before."

While Priestley is sometimes regarded as someone who attacked the very heart of Christianity this could not be further from the truth. He saw himself

preeminently in the role of an apologete of *authentic* Christianity.⁶ He was convinced that if a pre-Nicene Christianity--a Christianity with late christological corruptions peeled away--could be set forth, then those *real* enemies of the faith--the Deists, and sceptics such as Paine and Gibbon--could be invited to rethink the claims of revealed religion.

What provided him with the certainty that Catholic orthodoxy--Eastern, Western and Protestant--was a vast corruption of primitive Christianity, were the dual influences of Lockean and Newtonian canons of reasonableness and the accompanying Newtonian Biblical criticism of the received texts of scripture. Newton had boldly admitted that "homoousion is unintelligible...what cannot be understood is no object of belief" (McLachlan 1950:17). Newton had discovered evidence, by means of Erasmus's *Annotationes*, which suggested that such doctrines as the Trinity were late corruptions of Christianity and could be detected by means of textual criticism. Priestley was equally certain that other corruptions could be detected even without the hard textual data of variants.

B. Conjectural Emendation

In the very first volume of the journal founded by Priestley, *The Theological Repository*, we find a very early advocacy of the bold practice of conjectural emendation:

If, then, by only changing the situation of a sentence, or clause of a sentence, in a passage of the holy writers, which appears at present confused and obscure, we can render it regular and easy, and produce a new force and beauty in the sentiments; certainly, it will be no presumption to conclude that this was the original reading, though all the MSS and versions may exhibit the present reading (*The Theological Repository* 1769 Vol I:50).

⁶Perhaps his most evident work in this apologetic mode against such sceptics as Gibbon was Priestley's *Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever* (1782).

In this same article there was an allusion to a significant precedent for the practice of such conjecture on the text of the New Testament as found in a work produced in 1763 by an important English printer, William Bowyer, *Critical Conjectures and Observations on the New Testament* (London) which was accompanied by his own recension of the Greek N.T. This was greatly expanded by the fourth and definitive edition in 1812 (second ed. 1772, third ed. 1782) which was, however, like the third edition, edited not by Bowyer, who died in 1777, but by John Nichols, a close associate of Bowyer's. Here Bowyer collected as many important conjectures as he could locate from learned commentators on the Greek N.T. (Barrington, Landaff, Michaelis, Weston, Wettstein).

Bowyer gave a brief justification for considering conjectures in the preface to his second edition. He begins by noting that corruptions have made their way into the text and cites Wetstein's remarks regarding the intrusion of I Tim. 3:16 and the *comma Johanneum* (Bowyer 1812:6). These and most interpolations he believed to have originated as marginal glosses. He then poses the question:

But what shall we do for want of older MSS. which might give us the true readings before corruptions crept in? Shall we sometimes trust to versions which are older than any MSS. now remaining? Too precarious, I fear...(7).

The Itala version (*vetus Latina*) was "no sooner...published than Marcion, the heretic, and his followers seized it, and converted it to their own purposes" (7). And the oldest Greek MS in his day, Alexandrinus, was felt by Wetstein to have been "made to conform to the Vulgar Latin" (12), which leads Bowyer to suggest that "I do not know but that a critical sagacity must be our best guide in publishing a Greek Testament at last..." (13).

Although he argues that never should such conjectures be used to replace a reading without further MS evidence of some kind and yet

there are several [pure conjectures] which are highly probable, though the authority for them is lost.... Many of them are taken notice of in the course of this work; but when once pointed out, are left to the reader's disposal, to be rejected or adopted as he thinks fit (18).

Bowyer's cautious approach was well thought out in light of the criticism he knew he might receive. In a review of his third edition as it was found in the *Monthly Review* of 1782 Bowyer was lectured to posthumously in the following tone:

We observed in the beginning of this article, that conjectural criticism is too hazardous to be ventured on without great caution, and a very distinguished share of natural acuteness, and acquired knowledge. Infidels will avail themselves of this licence when rashly exercised by critics and commentators on the sacred Scriptures; and will question the whole from the freedom taken with the part.... ...when a person, without such authorities, alters the sacred text at pleasure, to serve a system, or to get rid of a difficulty, he betrays an irreverence for the Divine oracles; and, instead of removing, only increases the cavils of infidelity, and gives some colour to the cautionary pleas of Popery (*Monthly Review* 1782:123).

When the reviewer mentioned that such a practice would be serving a system he had as his referent Unitarianism. Earlier he had alluded to "the anti-Trinitarians...confidently availing[ing] themselves of the support of ...[a] very antient copy of the Greek Testament" (121). It was this method of reconstructing a more primitive expression of the original Christian message by way of conjecture that led Priestley to yet one final theological development in his own thought.

While he had moved some distance from the Westminster Catechism that he had memorised and recited as a child he nevertheless retained a belief in the miracles of the NT, including the virgin birth. After taking up the subject in earnest while compiling early patristic opinion on the "miraculous conception" of Jesus for his journal the *Theological Repository* Priestley abandoned this doctrine as well, both because it was unreasonable and because of evidence of its emergence as a late tradition. He records how this came about in his *An History of Early Opinions Concerning Jesus Christ, Compiled From Original Writers* 3 Vols. (1786):

There is one particular subject on which I have much enlarged in this treatise, and about which I had no intention to write at all, when I began to collect materials for it. It is the *miraculous conception* of Jesus, concerning which I had not at that time entertained any doubt; though I well knew that several very eminent and learned christians, of ancient and modern times,

had disbelieved it. The case was that, in perusing the early christian writers, with a view to collect all *opinions concerning Christ*, I found so much on this subject, that I could not help giving particular attention to it; and it being impossible not to be struck with the absurdity of their *reasoning* about it, I was by degrees led to think whether any thing better could be said in proof of the *fact*; and at length my collections and speculations, grew to the size that is now before the reader (Priestley 1786 Vol I:XVII-XVIII).

The *comma Johanneum* served as a model for how this theologically determinative dogmatic material could have been interpolated into the Gospel narratives:

The famous verse, [I] John, v.7., concerning the three that bear record in heaven, has been sufficiently proved to have come into the epistle in this unauthorised manner; and had it been done in an early period, there would have appeared no more reason to have suspected the genuineness of it, than there now does that of the introductions to the gospels of Matthew and Luke (Priestley 1786 Vol. III:105).

Furthermore, there was an important apologetic advantage to be gained by dispensing with this corruption of the virgin birth because the Jews make it a serious objection to the membership of Jesus, that according to the genealogies of Matthew and Luke, he does not appear to have been descended from David (Ibid.:115).

The issue of the virgin birth had been raised in a serious manner in 1771 by John Williams in his *A Free Enquiry into the Authenticity of the First and Second Chapters of St. Matthew's Gospel* (London). A dissenting minister and a keeper of Dr. Williams' Library, the work was originally published anonymously but by the second edition "corrected, improved, and much enlarged" (1789), Williams was the acknowledged author.

Williams' argument was that Matthew wrote his original edition in Hebrew (Syrio-chaldaic) and that this edition did not contain the genealogy found in the later Greek edition. Hence, the only explicit teaching of the virgin birth was a later addition. To call the section into question was not motivated by a desire to undermine the dogma of the virgin birth. Rather

the chief reason why I contend for an original Syrio-chaldaic Gospel by St. Matthew is, that unbelievers object to the contents of the first and second

chapters of that gospel in our present Greek copies; and it must be owned, that they are the most difficult and discordant parts in all the New Testament (42-43).

Moreover,

The author of this publication hath only to add, that he is a Christian upon principle; that he believes in a divine revelation; and that his sole design in writing, is to clear the sacred volume from inconsistencies and difficulties (44).

Hence, Williams is no sceptic, but like Newton and Priestley, a believer, motivated by an apologetic concern.

That such a large block of material made its way into the gospel account is not so strange an occurrence. The discipline of lower criticism has firmly established that

there are several additions and interpolations in the sacred volume, which, though they do not weaken the foundation of any doctrine, yet very often disturb the sense. They who are acquainted with Christian antiquity well know that there are several texts, in the present copies of both the Old and New Testament, the authenticity of which cannot stand an impartial enquiry.... It is much lamented, that the printers of these sacred books have, of late years, omitted to distinguish between doubtful texts, and those which were never questioned (7;8).

Williams argues, in light of the fact that

I John v. 7. is evidently a late interpolation; and when we recollect the controversy about the Trinity, which for so many years destroyed the peace of the church, it cannot be difficult to account for its insertion (156).

It was Emlyn and Isaac Newton who alerted him to this and "These authors, it is presumed, will convince every impartial enquirer, that the passage is not a genuine part of scripture" (14).

Surprisingly, Williams does not want to draw any theological conclusions based on the assumption of the spuriousness of the material containing the account of the virgin birth. Instead he resorts to Bentley's ideology of harmless engagement, affirming instead

that no one doctrine, or fact in Christianity will be affected by the omission of the first and second chapters of St. Matthew; for as to the genealogy, birth, &c. of Christ, we have, in St. Luke's Gospel, a full and consistent

account of them: whereas these chapters contain scarcely any thing but what is attended with almost inexplicable difficulties (163).⁷

Priestley, of course, by his very temperament, could never be governed by such subtlety. Too much was at stake.

He approached the subject in his journal the *Theological Repository*, founded by him in 1769 as a popular forum for airing theological debate and issues of Biblical criticism as they touched on dogma. Here one finds several essays suggesting conjectural emendation for various passages of both testaments, thus putting this journal well in advance of all of its contemporaries. In volume four (1784:245-305) of this series under the pseudonym *Ebionita* Priestley first raised the issue of the spuriousness of Matthew's account of the virgin birth, in an article titled: "Observations on the miraculous Conception," two years before he addressed it in his *History of the Early Opinions Concerning Jesus Christ* 4 Vols. 1786 (Birmingham). In volume five a *Nazaraeus* attempted a rebuttal of Priestley's arguments, but most replies to the original essay expressed a conviction affirming the unshakable nature of the evidence and the arguments against the genuineness of the first chapter of Matthew, and thus the illegitimacy of the dogma of the virgin birth. So far as I can tell this is the first major piece of historical research to explicitly denounce the dogma of the virgin birth based on the argument that it had been interpolated into the text by a later hand than that of the author.

Within the pages of his major treatise *History of the Early Opinions* (1786 vol. 3:100-123) he makes clear that his desire is to make Christ's messiahship evident to the Jews by dispensing with this bit of fable:

⁷Whether Williams believed what he was saying, or simply did not want to risk drawing the conclusions that both orthodox and non-orthodox alike would naturally be forced to come to, can only be guessed at.

The Jews make it a serious objection to the messiahship of Jesus, that, according to the genealogies of Matthew and Luke, he does not appear to have been descended from David, or even Judah; since it is only the genealogy of Joseph, his reputed father, that is given, and not his own, or his mother's (Priestley 1786 vol. 3:115).

He then goes on to quote various Rabbis who, indeed, make just this point.

That the apologetic concern underlay Priestley's goal to allow a primitive, non-dogmatic Christ (and yet miraculous) to emerge from the pages of the New Testament is never more clearly evident than when we see him actually engage the sceptics of his age. In his *Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever* (Part Two) 1787 (Birmingham) he confronts the unbelievers with the same cool rigours with which he dismantles orthodox accretions. To Gibbon and others he puts his case in these terms:

That the history of Christ and the apostles could not have established itself without the most rigid enquiry into its truth, is evident from the persecution of christians, which began immediately after its first promulgation, and in Jerusalem itself, the very scene of the transactions. In these circumstances men had every motive, and every opportunity, for enquiring whether they sacrificed their reputation, their properties, and their lives, for an idle tale, or for a truth of the greatest certainty and importance. All these things being considered, it appears to me that no facts in the whole compass of history, are so well authenticated as those of the miracles, the death, and the resurrection of Christ, and also what is related of the apostles in the book of Acts (Priestley 1787:62)

It was Priestley's landmark criticism of the virgin birth, however, based both on his perception of its irrationality as well as on the text-critical appeal to it as a corruption of original Christianity which furthered the project began by Newton to strip Christianity of its many late corruptions in order to give it a fresh hearing in a new scientific age. Cragg has noted of the relationship between Priestley and Newton:

He [Priestley] had taken Newtonian physics as his point of departure, and essentially his doctrine of materialism was merely a demand for a theory of human nature in conformity with the principles of science (Cragg 1964:233).

Newton's text-critical work on the New Testament was equally influential on Priestley's development of an historical method.

C. Hennell and Strauss

Another Unitarian who took Priestley's project further yet in the early nineteenth century, signalling the onset of a full-scale crisis for Victorian religion, was Charles C. Hennell. Though Hennell's contribution to the advancement of modern Biblical criticism has been little noted, Bernard Reardon in his accomplished treatment of nineteenth-century religion in Britain, *From Coleridge to Gore: A Century of Religious Thought in Britain* (1971), has called it "a landmark in the history of biblical study in this country" (Reardon 1971:254).

This is because Hennell was perhaps the first in Britain to advocate a thorough-going, naturalistic, or *higher* critical approach to understanding the Bible--independent of German influences--a method directly inspired by Priestley's work on the New Testament, particularly Priestley's dismissal of the virgin birth account as spurious. Hennell confessed in the first edition of his *An Enquiry Concerning the Origin of Christianity* (1838) that

The same method of free investigation which led Priestley... to throw doubt upon the truth of the opening chapters of Matthew and Luke, may allow other enquirers to make further excisions from the Gospel history (Hennell, 2nd ed. 1841:iii).

And further excisions he did make, resulting in a non-miraculous, naturalistic Christianity. While his arguments did not depend by this stage of development on hard textual evidence of the lower criticism, a sensitivity to earlier forms as opposed to later forms of N.T. accounts were certainly a significant part of Hennell's overall historical method and contributed to his arguments for a non-miraculous Christianity. Regarding the resurrection while

pointing out the many contradictions involved in the various accounts he did not fail to note that

It is remarkable that, if these verses [in Mark's longer account of the resurrection] be omitted, as we have seen was generally done in the early copies, *Mark, the follower of Peter, relates neither the miraculous birth, the resurrection, nor the ascension of Christ* (Hennell:247).

Appearing only three years after Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu* 2 vols. 1835, Hennell's work was produced independently of German influences and as such represents a distinctly English advancement of the same critical impulse but with explicit and perhaps exclusive links with the native English developments in this field going back to Priestley himself.

Hennell was part of a unique Unitarian community that included his sister, Sara Hennell, author of *Christianity and Infidelity* (1857), and *Essay on the Sceptical Tendency of Butler's Analogy* (1859)--the latter of which was praised by Gladston--Charles Bray, a former Methodist and his wife Caroline, Charles and Sara's sister, and finally, George Eliot. It would be Eliot who would translate Strauss's monumental work into English from the fourth German edition (1840), to which Strauss himself contributed a Latin preface (3 vols. 1846).

This witnesses to the fact that in the first half of nineteenth century Britain, nearly alone Unitarian scholars stood apace with the advance of German higher criticism. Valerie Dodd produced a commendable treatment of this period in her "Strauss's English Propagandists and the Politics of Unitarianism, 1841-1845" (1981). Here she points out that yet another English edition of Strauss was produced at this time. This, however, was a cheaper edition produced by "atheistic pamphleteers who, in the 1830s and 1840s, were eager to argue the falsity of the biblical narrative" for purposes of political intent to gain tolerance for religious dissidents (Dodd:425). This parallels one of the purposes behind the eighteenth century Antitrinitarian paraphrases.

She nevertheless skews things a bit when she generalizes that

Although German higher criticism did not "merely attack the Scriptures" but rather "studied them in a new spirit," it was to be censured, feared, ignored, or misunderstood in the early decades of the nineteenth century in England (Dodd 1981:415).

If she had added "and anticipated by English Unitarians" she would have hit her mark in a more comprehensive and informative way.⁸ She is correct when she says "In the early nineteenth century their [Unitarians'] religious views, unlike those of any of the other English sects, possessed affinities with the German higher criticism" but nowhere in her otherwise most helpful and insightful essay does she mention that it was specifically Priestley's legacy that formed the very seedbed from which this German/English collusion would emerge in the nineteenth century.

I believe this to be one result of over-periodization in historical writing. To one having devoted a good deal of attention to Priestley and the eighteenth century developments, Priestley's shadow looms large over the players on the nineteenth-century stage; to one looking only at nineteenth century developments on their own, he may well not appear at all (unless one took very careful notice of Hennell's note of indebtedness to this theologian-scientist in the preface to Hennell's ground-breaking work).

Finally, like Priestley, Hennell dispensed with *the* barrier to genuine historical criticism: the dogma of verbal inspiration:

The doctrine of the divine inspiration, or of the unquestionable veracity, of the Gospel writers, has hitherto hindered the full application of this free method of investigation to the New Testament, on the part of believers in Christianity; and unbelievers seem generally to have been more intent upon raising objections and cavils to the narratives as they stand, than in searching out the real truth. Hence it has frequently been observed, that no clear and intelligible account has been given of the life of Jesus Christ on simply

⁸She further clouds things a bit when she adds "Just as the whole topic of higher criticism was fading in Germany, it started to surface in England" (416). What she means is among those of the established church. Unitarians had led the field since the days of Priestley.

natural grounds; whence it has been argued, that no alternative remains but to regard him as the miraculous endowed personage presented to us in the four Gospels (Hennell: v).

D. Summary

Hennell, under the direct inspiration of Priestley's conjectural dismissal of the virgin birth (which in turn had been given its rationale based on the phenomenon of the *comma Johanneum* and secondarily by other such variants such as I Tim. 3:16),⁹ took Priestley's direction toward naturalism further than Priestley himself felt it necessary to go. In so doing Hennell properly introduced the *higher* critical method to England as a direct development of the *lower* criticism. In his words:

The reasons given by those eminent critics [Priestley and Belsham] for proceeding so far may appear more valid than any which can be urged for stopping where they did. The right of private judgment in the separation of truth from fiction being once accorded, the precise limits which ought to be assigned to the credible portion of the miraculous narratives are far from being obvious... (Hennell:iii).

Hence, Hennell concluded his account of the *Origin of Christianity* in terms not unlike those of Strauss:

The miraculous birth, works, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, being thus successively surrendered, to be classed amongst the fables of an obscure age, what remains of Christianity? and what is there in the life and doctrine of Jesus that they should still claim the attention and respect of mankind in remote ages? This: Christianity forms a striking passage in the history of human nature, and appears as one of the most prominent of the means

⁹I have not, up to this point, drawn attention to Priestley's judgement on I Tim. 3:16. In his *Notes on all the Books of Scripture for the Use of the Pulpit and Private Families* 4 vols. 1804, vol. iv, p.178, we read: "According to the pointing of some MSS. it may be rendered, *The mystery of godliness is the pillar and foundation of the faith*, and *without doubt it is great, &c.* There is little doubt but that the reading which our english [sic] translators followed, is a corrupt one; and that instead of the word God, the apostle wrote what we render *who*, saying he who was manifested in the flesh, that is Jesus Christ."

employed in its improvement. It no longer boasts of a special divine origin, but shares in that which the Theist attributes to the world and the whole order of its events (Hennell:481).

And as Dodd has pointed out, the only major difference between Strauss and Hennell is that Strauss's political vision was one very much attached to the status quo as a means for bringing in a new enlightened and tolerant age; whereas Hennell and those Unitarians in his community, including George Eliot, made their appeal for political change to enhance the lot of the English working class and for the tolerance of Antitrinitarians in particular.

Eliot's role in providing a channel by which Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu* could be Anglicised, and Hennell's *Inquiry* could be Germanized, with a commending preface by Strauss himself, is a well established point. That she owed her "liberation" from evangelicalism to Hennell's *Inquiry*, which in turn was the fruit of Priestley's textual and historical method, has not received sufficient treatment; nor has Priestley's over-all contribution to the development of historical criticism. Viewed as a continuation of Priestley's eighteenth-century project, a major aspect of the dawning of *higher* criticism in England can surely be understood as the offspring of Priestley's *lower* criticism.

PART THREE

The Contribution of the Lower Criticism to the Victorian Crisis of Faith

CHAPTER NINE

Samuel P. Tregelles, Constantine Tischendorf and Samuel Davidson: Mid-Century, non-Conformist Adjustments and the Dismantling of the Second Phase of the Ideology of Harmless Engagement

"The recognition that the Bible was not without error was facilitated by developments in textual criticism. Belief in verbatim inspiration furnished a powerful motive for ascertaining exactly what the text of the Bible was. But the attempt to do so revealed that in some passages it was impossible to ascertain the original text.... Growing realization that inerrancy could only apply to a non-existent Bible and not to the one people actually read and used certainly weakened the hold of the old conception of biblical authority and accustomed people to the possibility of errors and interpolations.... No wonder textual criticism was an avenue by which men were led to accept the validity of higher criticism!"

--W.B. Glover, *Evangelical Nonconformists and Higher Criticism in the Nineteenth Century* 1954, pp.85;86;87.

A. Introduction

Samuel Davidson is a significant figure for our study because he displays the effects textual variants had on his understanding of the Trinity and the incarnation. Furthermore, he played a key role in advancing the textual work of the German, Tischendorf, in Britain, thus paving the way for a greater acceptance of textual criticism and its implications for theology.

Moreover, both Davidson and Tischendorf contributed to the deconstruction of the second phase of the ideology of harmless engagement, that propounded by the non-conformist, Samuel Tregelles. Davidson did so

primarily by highlighting the late development of doctrines such as the deity of Christ and the Trinity by appeal to textual variants; Tischendorf did so primarily by repudiating and refuting the dogma of *verbal* inspiration, again a further implication drawn from the data resulting from the textual criticism of the Greek N.T. He also paved the way for accepting the plausibility of conclusions arrived at by Renan and Strauss regarding the nineteenth century *Leben-Jesu Forschung*. He did this by rejecting more consistently doctrinally motivated interpolations than any other editor of the Greek New Testament in his day.¹

B. Samuel Davidson (1806-1898)²

Davidson published major treatises on nearly every aspect of Biblical studies--for *both* Testaments--works treating hermeneutics, Biblical criticism, Biblical introduction and the canon. He also produced a translation of the New Testament from a critical edition; and finally, he produced his own recension of

¹For example, Tischendorf in his first edition published as early as 1840, was the first published Greek N.T. to excise the long ending of Mark containing both the resurrection account as well as the ascension.

²The *Dictionary of National Biography* incorrectly lists his date of death as 1899 and *Men and Women of the Time*, 13th edition, incorrectly has 1807 as his date of birth. My dates are those given in his autobiography (Davidson 1899:vii-xi). Davidson has received surprisingly little treatment in English sources. He receives no notice in Kümmel (1972), nor in the otherwise rather comprehensive work by Baird (1992), nor in the interesting though selective work by O'Neill (1991). He seems to be omitted altogether from the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, but found a place in the hearts of his German contemporaries, namely, Philip Schaff's supplement to the Schaff-Herzog *Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, titled: *Encyclopedia of Living Divines* (1887), which has a rather complete treatment (Schaff/Jackson 1887:49-50). He has recently found a place, however, in the Open University's four volume, *Religion in Victorian Britain* (Parsons 1988A:240-250); (Parsons 1988B:104).

the O.T. text. He also busied himself translating German sources of theology and Biblical studies into English--always a prodigious labourer in the field, perhaps without equal outside of Germany, in his lifetime.

Davidson's career spanned three quarters of the nineteenth century and embodied in microcosm the entire developmental sweep of textual criticism, from the simple Renaissance beginnings of Erasmian probing in his early career, to the full development of the higher criticism by the end of the nineteenth century. Theologically, Davidson began as a near pre-critical, Reformation Calvinist, ascribing allegiance to the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, which, in later life, he completely abandoned in favour of his own Unitarian creed, resting finally on the theology of Schleiermacher. To study Davidson is to study the nineteenth century.

Davidson's parents were of Scottish descent but he was born in Kellswater, County Antrim, Ireland. While he began his education in the village school, he eventually attended the newly founded (opened in February 1814) Royal Academical Institution in Belfast.³ His Scottish Presbyterian roots may have contributed to his early decision to become a minister within the Irish Presbyterian Church.

On his entrance to the College he took a first in both Greek and Latin and also studied French. By 1832 he had completed his course and had

³This institution was founded in 1814 with the stated goals being "To diffuse as widely as possible throughout the province and population of Ulster, the benefits of Education, both useful and liberal; and by that means, to prevent the hard and disgraceful necessity, in such a great and prosperous community, of sending their children to seek in other countries, with much risk to their health and morals, for that instruction, and those literary qualifications and honours, which might be equally well attained at home, with evident advantage to the public interest as well as to that of individuals" (*Fourth Report of the Commissioners of the Irish Education Inquiry*, 1827:6).

accumulated firsts in Hebrew, a premium in logic, and a silver medal in classics. He was then licensed in November of the following year by his presbytery.

While at the Royal Institute a major controversy arose over the Arianism of several of the Professors teaching Divinity (and other subjects), one of which was Davidson's Professor in Latin and Greek, William Bruce;⁴ another was Davidson's Hebrew Professor, whom Davidson called "one of my best friends," Professor T.D. Hincks. Rev. Henry Cooke, "the great champion of the orthodox part" (Latimer 1902:427), once elected Moderator of Davidson's synod, the Synod of Ulster, in 1824, went on a house-cleaning attempting to rid the Royal Academical Institution of all Arians.⁵

Protesting against Rev. William Bruce's appointment to the professorship of Hebrew, Cooke argued that even the very teaching of Hebrew, "if taught without orthodox fetters, would get a Socinian twist in the letters" (Latimer:429). In 1825 Rev. Cooke appeared before a Royal Commission and before a Select Committee of both Houses of Parliament, decrying that the Royal Institute was soon to fall completely into the hands of the Arians.⁶

⁴Traces of Arianism can be found in the Presbytery of Antrim as far back as 1726 when it was separated from the Synod of Ulster over this issue. Recall also that Thomas Emlyn's influence in the Protestant churches, both the established church and the Presbyterian churches, both as a result of his writings as well as his imprisonment, helped to create a ferment around the subject of the Trinity in his Dublin years 1691-1704.

⁵When once a Rev. J. Smethurst from England did a preaching tour of Ulster in an attempt to win the Arians over to Humanitarianism, Cooke followed him at every stop stirring up the conservatives against the Englishman, so that Smethurst finally left, having made only one convert (Latimer:428).

⁶For standard treatments of this controversy see, Reid (1867:445-466); Killen (1875:231-441); Latimer (1902:427-444) and the *Fourth Report of the Commissioners of Irish Education Inquiry* (1927:3-98).

In 1835, five years after the Arians had broken away from the Synod of Ulster and formed the Remonstrant Synod of Ulster (1830), Davidson was appointed by the winning, orthodox party in the dispute, to the newly created post of Professor of Biblical Criticism at his own college.⁷ His salary was very low, however, mostly students' fees. He spent seven hard years at the Presbyterian college and when he applied for a better post, a Professorship of Hebrew at the Glasgow College, he was rejected.⁸

Davidson felt that the position he had wanted had gone to a Scottish minister less gifted than himself and with less distinguished letters of recommendation, because the latter belonged to the moderate party in Scotland. No doubt the dubious reputation of the Royal Institute, because of the Arian controversy, had contributed to the decision to go with a safe Scotsman.

Davidson had earlier received an honorary M.A. from Aberdeen and soon after saw through the press his *Lectures on Biblical Criticism* (the fruit of his seven years of lecturing), which had received a good review in the *Edinburgh Review* (Oct. 1840). He must have surely felt, therefore, that the position was his to be had. Hence, this experience, early in his career, caused him to feel the blunt edge

⁷That Davidson held to a public orthodoxy at this time is evident from his having to subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith to be licensed to preach upon finishing his course at the college. While he did so with some reservations, reflecting later he admitted "my mind was in traditional fetters at the time, and I hardly realised the serious responsibility of declaring assent and consent to an extensive system of metaphysical theology" (Davidson 1899:13).

⁸ Thus Davidson felt the sting of ecclesiastical politics, stating in his memoirs that though he "received flattering testimonials not only from such as knew me best in Ireland, but from two eminent English scholars, Drs. Pye Smith and E. Henderson.... the choice of the electors (the college professors themselves) having fallen upon a minister of the Church of Scotland at Maybole, who belonged to the 'moderate' party, and was elected mainly on that account" (Davidson 1899:15).

of Church politics. In later reflections he revealed the permanent effect the Arian controversy had upon him:

This separation [of the synods] left its hurtful mark on the spirit and conduct of the dominant majority; especially on the leaders of the orthodox party. It was lamentable to witness the *animus* displayed: the *odium theologicum* in its worst form. A schism, brought about by appeals to passion, prejudice, ignorance, and tradition, could promote neither truth nor religion.... As usual, orthodoxy prevailed by numbers.... I had too many opportunities of seeing the manifestations of selfish tyranny and ambition in the great ecclesiastical demagogue, not to turn from the spectacle with a feeling of disgust (Davidson 1899:17).

This experience of the Arian controversy, coupled with his rejection at Glasgow, and his later dismissal from the Congregational College (to be treated below), meant that Davidson never produced his many studies on Biblical criticism from a purely detached and disinterested academic motive. Like the Antitrinitarian pioneers in Biblical criticism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, he knew that in time, the public dissemination of data challenging orthodox Trinitarianism--the result of free inquiry--would be the eventual undoing of the intolerant political dominance of the orthodox.⁹

About the time of the founding of a new Congregational theological college in Manchester--a city which had gained the reputation as a centre of non-

⁹The following sentiment must be kept in view as contributing to Davidson's overall orientation: "Free thinkers have not had an easy life. Servetus was burnt at Geneva, chiefly through Calvin's hatred of his opinions; Toland's *Christianity not Mysterious* was burnt by order of the Irish House of Commons, the author escaping seizure by leaving the country; John Biddle died in a noisome prison; and the body of Huss was consumed at the stake. The zeal of the cleric usually outruns that of the magistrate against heresy; and Gibbon may well observe with sorrow, that the three writers of the last age before his, by whom the rights of conscience were so nobly defended, Bayle, Leibnitz, and Locke, were all laymen and philosophers. The theory of toleration may be preached: it is still violated in practice, nourished as it is by the fanaticism of ignorance or the bitterness of orthodoxy" (Davidson 1899:118-119).

conformity--Davidson came to have doubts about the Biblical basis of the Presbyterian form of church order. He therefore applied for a teaching post there and was awarded a professorship which he assumed in 1843. Here he had more breathing room than he ever would have experienced either in Belfast or in Glasgow, though this college was still rather conservative (Thompson 1893).

The same year, he published his *Sacred Hermeneutics*, in which we find a tribute to Erasmus. Here Davidson reveals his sense of kinship with the Prince of the Humanists. Davidson's appreciation of Erasmus as the fountainhead of a restorationist primitivism is evident in his recognizing that it was Erasmus who first

entered upon a substantial examination of Scripture, unfettered by the authority of fathers and councils.... His *Paraphrases* and *Annotations* on the books of the New Testament, form a prominent era in the history of Biblical interpretation. The method pursued in them far surpasses any that preceded (Davidson 1843:182).

In Erasmus, Davidson finds the ideal model, one who echoes the values which perhaps for the first time he has found the voice to express since his days in Belfast. Erasmus's is

the *independent position* which the sacred interpreter should assume. He should be untrammelled by the ancient commentators, as though they had said all that is sufficient, or by the laborious compilers of the medieval age. Of the former he speaks with respect and reverence, although he frequently dissents from their views. Upon the latter he animadvert more freely, not concealing their faults or forbearing to mention the glaring mistakes into which they fell. In this way Erasmus put himself in a right position for discovering truth. He opened his eyes to the fallibility of the sources to which a slavish attachment had for ages been given, and allowed his strong intellect to put forth independent decisions upon the meaning of the written word (Davidson 1843:183).

Davidson could have been describing himself.

Later in this treatment Davidson cited at length and with approval, the passage from Erasmus's annotation on Matt. 2:6 where Erasmus freely admitted the inspired evangelist had made a clear error. It had been this text that was the occasion of Eck's criticism of Erasmus and represents in a rather tangible

manner, the beginnings of the desacralization of the Christian Bible in the early modern era.

In his autobiography Davidson reflects an idealism strikingly similar to Erasmus's project, hoping to see the dissolution of an external, intolerant, dogmatic orthodoxy, in favour of a simple, near creedless faith:

I have small hope for the revival of religion in England--small hope for the advancement of spiritual truth--till existing Church organizations crumble to pieces, and something better appears in their place--something that rejects adventitious elements and retains a few cardinal principles. Why should we not revert to the simple ethical precepts of Jesus as the basis of thought and life.... My fond dream is of a better age--one of liberty and love, in which the theological rubbish, accumulated for centuries, will be cleared away. My dream is of a Church of the future, different from any now existing--broader, simpler, baptized with heavenly fire, having a large measure of the spirit that dwelt in the Divine Master without measure.... The charity which hopes all things will throw her mantle around it, and the jarrings of theologians be heard no more; their envyings, hatreds, and jealousies nestling henceforward in the dwelling-places of demons (Davidson 1899:86-88).

These could have been the words of Erasmus. One almost expects to find a reference to the *Enchiridion*, so common is the rhetoric and the sentiment!

In the summer of the very next year, 1844, Davidson made a momentous visit to Germany, what he called "the trip to the land of learning." He had already established his reputation as a formidable authority on Biblical criticism so it was a natural impulse to want to visit the fount from whence came all his inspiration.

On this visit, the first in a series of visits he would make over the years, he met Neander, Bleek, Tholuck--all rather moderate thinkers by German standards. He confessed to being "greatly stimulated and encouraged," so much so that he went on a quest to discover Semler's grave, but to his disappointment, no one seemed to know where it was.

During the next few years while lecturing full-time he translated Gieseler's *Compendium of Ecclesiastical History*, published between 1846-47. This was the beginning of his life's passion--to be the conduit that would convey German

scholarship into Britain. He was rewarded for his efforts a few years later, shortly after the publication of the first volume of his *An Introduction to the New Testament* in 1848: the University of Halle awarded him the D.D.. Only one other British scholar in his day ever received such a degree from this prestigious German university, Dr. Samuel Lee of Cambridge (Davidson 1899:27).

C. Horne's *Introduction*

His early reputation as a man whose scholarship was put to the aid of a traditional conservatism, howbeit a non-conformist Christianity, was by now well established. So much so that the publishers, Longmans, invited him to contribute an updated edition of the O.T. volume in Thomas Hartwell Horne's standard critical (by British standards) introduction of the day, *An Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scripture*, a massive work in print continuously since 1818 and about to go into its tenth edition at this time. Davidson's acceptance of this project would cost him his teaching post and brand him for the rest of his life as a Rationalist.¹⁰

Thomas Hartwell Horne (1780-1862), like Davidson, began his publishing career as a non-conformist, reared initially within the established church, but converted in early manhood to the Methodist tradition. Horne's father had been the clerk of an eminent barrister. As a youngster Horne "received the rudiments of a classical education" at Christ's Hospital (Cheyne 1862:4), and during the summer of 1790 he was tutored there by Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

¹⁰For an interesting treatment of how this word "Rationalist" was understood during the Victorian era see Mark Pattison's contribution to *Essays and Reviews*, "Tendencies of Religious Thought in England, 1688-1750."

The first published work he produced was a musing intended to shore-up his own faith after having read "an infidel novel of French origin" (Cheyne: 9). In his, *A Brief View of the Necessity and Truth of the Christian Revelation* (1800), his goal was, in good common-sense fashion,

to state facts, plainly and truly, as they happened, avoiding all speculative reasoning and rash conclusions.... [to] prove...that there was a person named Jesus Christ [and that the N.T. documents contain a] true statement of facts (Horne 1800:vii).

In 1801 he attended the Wesleyan Methodist Church and in his words, "like other fools who went to scoff, I remained to pray" (Cheyne: 11), thus becoming a non-conformist dissenter. No longer within the shelter of the church catholic where one could find her support as "witness, and keeper of Holy Writ," the impulse to establish the veracity of Biblical content, external of ecclesiastical authority, therefore, was a significant motive driving Horne into the arena of Biblical Introduction.¹¹

As early as 1801 Horne had planned to produce what would become the single most popular treatment of Biblical Introduction written in English in the nineteenth century. In 1818 the first edition was complete and soon won him international acclaim as an industrious scholar of the first order. He personally sent out close to seventy promotional copies, world-wide, and his hard work was not in vain: he was rewarded by seeing his *Introduction* expanded, and continuously in print, for the rest of his life--forty-two years--and beyond (Cheyne: 30).

As Davidson's energies would eventually be focused to bring the orthodox to see and respond to data that challenged the religious establishment, eventually

¹¹ It was J.W. Fletcher's "logical and unanswerable" *Appeal to Matters of Fact and Common Sense; or, a Rational Demonstration of Man's Corrupt and Lost Estate*, that brought Horne, in his own words, "a humble penitent to the throne of grace" (Cheyne:12).

Horne's work came to be seen as an important and significant *support* of the status quo of Anglican orthodoxy. Hence, not only did Horne's *Introduction* earn him an M.A. from Aberdeen, he was drafted into the Anglican communion in 1819 on the strength of this publication, accepting ordination and a living to the curacy of Christ Church, London.¹²

Horne in time displayed himself to be a near fulsome advocate of the established church and high Tory politics, producing published sermons such as, *The Sovereign's Prayer and the People's Duty: A Sermon Delivered on the Sunday After the Coronation of Her Majesty*, 1838; and *The Conformity of the Church of England in Her Ministry, Doctrine and Liturgy, to the Apostolic Precept and Pattern*, 1833, at the conclusion of which he read the entire *Thirty-Nine Articles* (these are appended to the published form of the sermon). He also published a series of anti-Papal treatises.¹³

Charles Simeon, the leading Evangelical Anglican in Horne's day, made the following comments in a letter to Horne, replying to his *The Conformity of the Church of England*:

Without the loss of an hour I have gone through it, much delighted with the sermon and much edified with your notes. I hope it will be of

¹²In his own words: "For many years I had the privilege and comfort of being in communion with the Wesleyan Methodists, among whom I found many kind friends.... I quitted that Society, only when the ecclesiastical regulations of the Church of England rendered my retirement from them necessary, previously to my preparing for ordination in that section of the Church Universal" (Cheyne:18). Later he conceded that it had long been his desire to enter the ministry of the Church of England (35).

¹³These were, *Romanism Contradictory to the Bible*, 1827; *Mariolatry or Facts and Evidences Demonstrating the Worship of the Blessed Virgin Mary by the Church of Rome*, 1841; *Popery the Enemy and the Falsifier of Scripture*, 1844; *The Identity of Popery and Tractarianism*, 1844; *The Novelty of Romanism Demonstrated by Historical Facts*, 1847; *Popery Delineated*, 1848.

substantial benefit, not to your parishioners only, but to the public at large. That observation of Wm. Brittan's is worth a great deal: "Division is their sin, and division is their punishment." It hits the nail admirably, and is characteristic of the great body of Dissenters. Of all the friends that you have not one has rejoiced more unfeignedly than I at the appointment of my friend to a living (Simeon 1834).

Thus Horne, who had not the advantage of a university education, earned the respect of his evangelical peers, the established church, and an international community of conservative scholars throughout the English-speaking world who were in his debt for his definitive *Introduction*.

In his seventy-fourth year, because of his failing health, Horne was not able to attend to the production of a tenth edition of his work. Furthermore, he was now ill equipped to keep up with the advance of scholarship in the 1850's, now flooding out of Germany. Samuel Davidson, however, was, and so became the obvious choice to revise the Old Testament section of Horne's work.¹⁴

Davidson accepted the invitation but with one major *proviso*: he must be given complete liberty to begin afresh with a new work, rather than adopt his research to an earlier framework. This was because Davidson intended to introduce to English readers, "new ground--such ground as the subjects have been brought to, not only here, but especially in other countries" (Davidson 1899:37), and by this he meant *German* scholarship. To this, both Horne and the publishers agreed. Davidson contributed one other feature to this tenth edition. It was his suggestion that another non-conformist, the Plymouth Brother, Samuel Tregelles, be invited to do the section treating New Testament text criticism (37). This is particularly ironic in light of the keen animosity that would develop between them lasting till the end of their careers.

¹⁴I. Ellis's treatment of this account of Davidson's contribution to Horne's *Introduction* is a bit muddled, *cf.* Ellis (1980:4-5).

Up to this point both Tregelles and Davidson had acknowledged one another's works in a friendly fashion. In the 1853 edition of his treatise on Biblical criticism, Davidson expressed

his obligations to Dr. S.P. Tregelles for various hints, suggestions, and cautions by means of which his book has been improved. The ready advice of this most learned and Christian friend has never been wanting. It has been freely and generously given (Davidson 1853:ix-x).

In kind, Tregelles, in 1848, had referred to the first volume of Davidson's *Introduction to the New Testament* as of "peculiar importance to the Biblical student... the sooner it is completed the better" (Tregelles 1881:xxviii).¹⁵ Moreover, he cites Davidson's approach to textual criticism in his *Biblical Criticism*, as

the manner in which I desire to act with regard to each *disputed passage*: each must stand or fall according to the *evidence* with which it comes. Let traditional feelings be set aside, and the judgement will generally be formed without *much* difficulty (xxvii).

Davidson had argued in a similar vein criticising the traditionalism which enveloped scholarship as practiced from within Anglicanism:

Almost all Episcopalians are prejudiced in favour of the authenticity of Ignatius's Epistles; and it is useless to try to convince them of the contrary. They will not exercise the critical faculty impartially on that subject, as also on many others. Put a man into a high position in the Church, and you need not expect from him much independent judgment on theological topics. Content with the creeds of antiquity, he sees no reason for departing from them. Tradition saves the trouble of toilsome and conscientious examination (Davidson 1899:181).

¹⁵ While I have quoted this from a later 3rd edition of this work, it is located in a "To the Reader" which was first published in 1848 and is found unaltered (but for footnotes in brackets) in this edition. Moreover, in his earlier, *The Book of Revelation in Greek* (1844), he had said, "On the subject of Biblical Criticism in general I may mention 'Lectures on Biblical Criticism. By Samuel Davidson, LL.D. Edinburgh, 1839.' I know of no volume in English which gives so much information on the subject, and with as much correctness." He then adds the ominous words: "Of course I do not vouch for *every* fact or *every* conclusion" (Tregelles 1844:vi). Perhaps already Tregelles sensed Davidson's capacity to be more comprehensive than himself.

Here the solidarity of these two non-conformists can clearly be seen in their radical project of disallowing ecclesiastical tradition any input into the process of determining the authenticity of documents. Both express a supreme reliance on the ability of the nineteenth-century "scientific approach" to arrive at a consensus.

There was, however, also a major difference between them: Davidson came to be convinced that such a procedure would eventually *overturn* established catholic orthodoxy regarding the Trinity, while Tregelles is *equally* convinced that such Christological orthodoxy can only be *confirmed* by such an external verification process. Thus here we have yet another example of the double edged sword of rationalism. In this case each respectively represents the two directions of non-conformist text criticism that came to expression in the early nineteenth century: one claiming that archaeological-like repristination leads to a non-Trinitarian form of Christianity, based on the best attested textual evidence;¹⁶ while the other sees such restorationism as *always* resulting in a purer, and therefore a firmer, expression of ancient orthodoxy.

Both conclusions rested on a different interpretation of the implications of various strategic, doctrinally significant, textual variants: one interpretation rooted in the freedom experienced only in the German context, the other rooted in the old Scottish Common-Sense approach, which demands that the evidence fit a predetermined orthodox framework, while claiming all the while to be "just letting the facts speak for themselves."

¹⁶Davidson signed his name to a prospectus, written by his friend, Dr. Willis, intended to gather support for a reprint of Servetus's *Christianismi Restitutio*, but because sponsorship was never forthcoming, the project never materialised (Davidson 1899:117).

Both conclusions rested on a different interpretation of the implications of various strategic, doctrinally significant, textual variants: one interpretation rooted in the freedom experienced only in the German context, the other rooted in the old Scottish Common-Sense approach, which demands that the evidence fit a predetermined orthodox framework, while claiming all the while to be "just letting the facts speak for themselves."

All this sweetness and light between Davidson and Tregelles was, therefore, doomed to evaporate in time. Upon the arrival of Davidson's contribution to Horne's *magnum opus*, the occasion had arrived. What no one had understood at the time was that Davidson, since his visits to Germany, had experienced a significant reorientation in his understanding of Biblical literature. This is illustrated in the words of one of his contemporaries, Paton Gloag, of Edinburgh:

Evidently a great alteration had come over his critical opinions.... If I may venture a conjecture, I think it was fostered by his exaggerated estimate of the writings of the Great German theologians (Davidson 1899:351).

Gloag went on to explain where this change could be detected within the history of Davidson's publishing career:

The most valuable of Dr. Davidson's works are the two Introductions to the New Testament.... These two Introductions proceed on very different lines; so much so that if it were not for the unity of style, the sameness of many of the critical references, the lists of words and phrases, and the common line of argument, one would think that they were written by different authors. The first proceeds on orthodox or traditional lines; the second is advanced, almost approaching to the views of the Tübingen school (352).

Davidson himself had described his propensity to evolve in terms reminiscent of Priestley:

As I look back, I feel that I have made many mistakes, and that my ignorance is still great. Who can fathom the mysteries of Providence and life? Yet I have always tried to grow in knowledge and to supplement former beliefs. In the light of opinions which appeared more correct, I abandoned others. I have not scrupled to learn from sceptics; neither have I rejected orthodox teaching. Knowledge has been welcome from every source--from unbelieving Strauss and believing Hengstenberg--from John Calvin and John Toland. If I was not able to stereotype my theological sentiments at an

early period,--if they shifted and enlarged,--I could not help it without resisting the authority of conscience. The reproach of changing is surely unfair. Where is the thinker who has not done so? (113).

Gloag assessed Davidson in terms of two stages, one where his scholarship was used to defend orthodoxy; and the latter the stage that witnessed his scholarship in the service of an anti-Trinitarian rationalism:

It is well known that in the early part of his career Dr. Davidson was decidedly more orthodox and positive in his views; indeed, some of the best defenses of the traditional views are still derived from his early works, especially from his *Introduction to the New Testament*, in three volumes in 1848 (351).

Davidson was wont, therefore, even in his own lifetime, to instruct his readers that,

The only work of mine which I wish to be quoted on [regarding] the books of the New Testament is the last edition of my Introduction, dated 1882 (the third edition, that of 1894, was not published when this letter was written), which is a considerable advance on that of 1868. As to the three-volume one of 1848, it is entirely superseded and out of print. It represents views no longer mine (353).

In 1854, however, when the invitation had been extended to him to produce a revision of Horne's work, there was as yet no public evidence of Davidson's development. To all appearances he was still an advocate of the old orthodoxy. By accepting the task Davidson fully realized that here was an opportunity to showcase his current grasp of contemporary German methods. Davidson could only have seen this invitation as most fortuitous. Here was an occasion to be the channel, *par excellence*, through which the very latest results of German scholarship--the only scholarship Davidson deemed worthy of the name--could pass. In his daughter's words Davidson

saw that many traditional opinions as to the origin, authorship, and character of the books bound up in the Old Testament were no longer tenable; and he considered that he would be doing a service to religion in Great Britain by helping to acquaint English people with the sounder views already prevalent in Germany. Still, he must have foreseen that, amongst the little world of the college constituents, any doubt thrown upon the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch would seem like sacrilege; and his quiet persistent application to the work for two years during the intervals of his college duties must have been an effort of silent heroism (Davidson 1899:41).

perspective. The publishers let him have his way little suspecting what the results would be.¹⁷

Once the work was completed, it had all the appearances of a treatise produced in the atmosphere of a German university: comprising eleven hundred tightly compacted pages, addenda, and three indices totalling thirty-eight pages, it lacked nothing in comprehensiveness. This was meant to be *the* critical, nineteenth-century treatment of the Old Testament in English.

D. Inspiration, Again

Shortly after its arrival, in spite of there being so much content, and much that Tregelles himself would have said, it was just a few pages, 372-376, treating Biblical inspiration, to which Tregelles turned his attention.¹⁸ Tregelles had said in his own words, on many occasions, that Biblical criticism should not be feared but should be seen as God's providential means for purifying the inspired deposit. In particular in his *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament* (1854) he confidently proclaimed: "Criticism...need not be at all

¹⁷In the words of one of his apologists, Davidson, "considered that the progress made in Biblical Criticism ... or perhaps, to put it more accurately, the increased literary and scholarly intercourse between England and Germany, made it impossible to keep up any longer in this country a little water-tight compartment, as it were, of effete criticism guaranteed against the floods of better-informed opinion that had broken loose elsewhere" (Davidson 1899:36). This evaluation would hold true, in Davidson's opinion, for Tregelles's conservative project as much as for the kind of Biblical criticism practiced within the established church.

¹⁸This locus on Biblical inspiration could only have been discovered in the course of reading the entire work because Davidson had provided no index listing for "inspiration."

feared; if it takes away on the one hand readings which were thought to have some dogmatic value, it will give on the other quite as much" (Tregelles 1854:234).¹⁹ Davidson echoed the same spirit in his preface: "It is not necessary that the fellowship of the spirit with God should be interrupted or marred by the investigations of historical criticism into the books of Scripture" (Davidson 1856:vi).

Moreover, Davidson had made clear that for interpreting Scripture aright, "an irreligious interpreter is wholly incompetent, for his heart furnishes no key to the Bible revelations" (207) and equally in keeping with Tregelles's own conviction, Davidson affirmed that "the language employed by the inspired writers is such as we can readily apprehend. Hence *the Bible is to be explained on the same principles as other books*" (207). Tregelles had spent his entire career attempting to argue just this in the realm of text-critical practice. And yet, because Davidson had dared to be consistent in following this conviction, even into the realm of inspiration, Tregelles attacked him with a ferocity that Davidson could have little expected.

Without engaging Davidson personally about his misgivings, Tregelles was so alarmed about what he read in Davidson's volume regarding inspiration, he sent the following letter to more than one newspaper, one of which was the most conservative, low church paper in England, *the Record*:

As a new edition of 'Horne's Introduction' bears, in conjunction with the names of the Rev. T.H. Horne and Dr. Samuel Davidson, *my own*, as one of the editors, perhaps you will allow me to state that Mr. Horne and myself only are responsible for the sentiments expressed in those portions which we respectively undertook to edit. In writing on the subject of the Holy Scriptures I trust that I have ever sought to uphold its plenary authority as inspired by the Holy Ghost; and thus it has been with sorrow as well as

¹⁹ That he was completely mistaken on this point in both his dogmatic-like formularization as well as in the actual facts of the matter is the thesis of this chapter.

surprise, that I have observed that Dr. Davidson has used this work as the occasion for avowing and bringing into notice many sentiments and theories with regard to Scripture which his former works would not have intimated that he held, and his adoption of which was *wholly unknown* to Mr. Horne and myself. We find ourselves thus in an unexpected position, being in danger of being supposed to be, in some measure, responsible for opinions which we earnestly repudiate. Indeed, I may say that I am grieved that what I have written with a different object, and on different principles, should appear as part of the same work as that against which I feel bound to protest (Davidson 1857:4-5).

Once this letter appeared, in the words of Davidson's friend, J Allanson Picton, "the fire ran swiftly amongst the dry tinder of zeal without knowledge" (Davidson 1899:42). In an account written by Davidson in his own defense, requested of him by a sub-committee of his college, titled: *Facts, Statements, and Explanations Connected with the Publication of the Second Volume of the Tenth Edition of Horne's Introduction to the Study of The Holy Scriptures Entitled "The Text of the Old Testament" Considered*, London, 1857, he charged Tregelles with being dishonest in claiming not to have known what was going to appear because,

all the sheets of the entire work had been forwarded from the beginning to the end, to all the parties concerned in it, so that both Mr. Horne and Dr. Tregelles knew everything I had written all along, or had the opportunity of knowing it, while I had the same means of observing their sentiments (Davidson 1857:5).²⁰

Nevertheless, because Tregelles's letter had been reprinted in much of the conservative popular religious press, Davidson took a great deal of public abuse,

²⁰Davidson's daughter reaffirms this, noting that her father had "derived encouragement from the fact, that while proofs were constantly interchanged between Mr. Horne, Dr. Tregelles, and himself, no hint was given that either of his colleagues had any apprehension that his work would create alarm. As both these gentlemen might well be taken to represent the more conservative section of evangelical Christians, Dr. Davidson might fairly take their silence as a token that he need have no fear of disturbing the churches in whose interest the college was maintained" (Davidson 1899:41). No doubt, neither Tregelles nor Horne had actually taken the time to read the proofs with any care, probably trusting implicitly Davidson's judgements based on his earlier publications.

particularly from the low church, evangelical, wing of the Anglican communion (7-8). Although, the *Clerical Journal* and the *Journal of Sacred Literature* publicly condemned the shameless treatment Davidson had experienced, particularly at the hands of the *Record* (8-9).

Davidson was condemned for everything from denying the Trinity, to having drawn parallels between certain mythic narratives from the Old Testament with classical accounts in Virgil (both Erasmus and Grotius had also suffered severe criticism for drawing such parallels). The rhetoric was typical of the times: "A Man like Davidson *had only to study at Halle*, and, having acquired the German language," he then returned to Manchester "with a trunk-load of Neologian nonsense"(8).

It was Davidson's denial of verbal inspiration, however, that was perceived to be at the bottom of all his infidelity. Davidson had settled the problem of wanting to retain Biblical authority while also honestly admitting that there was error in the text when touching on matters of historical detail, natural science, etc., in the following terms:

Sometimes the diction employed respecting natural things is neither scientific nor optical, nor popular in any sense except as involving erroneous conceptions on the part of the people and partaking of them.... If...there was an accommodation on the part of the writers to the ideas of their times respecting the objects of nature the possibility of their not being so far enlightened or inspired as to have correct, infallible knowledge on points of natural science, on chronology, archaeology, geography, &c., suggests itself to the reflecting mind (Davidson 1856:372).

Davidson then assured his readers that his approach to these problems was not new, pointing to Pye Smith, a non-conformist; Thomas Arnold a Broad Churchman and Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford; Rev. B. Powell of Oxford; Coleridge; and finally, the German moderate, Tholuck, as earlier examples of those who had argued as he did.

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Therefore, it was Davidson's first response to critics to point out that the narrow confines of the evangelical, low church party of the Church of England, did not constitute the *regula fidei* of the Anglican communion:

Assuredly the high preeminence which the Church of England holds in theological literature and sound scholarship has not been attained through Low Church divines. Treatises of distinguished merit do not proceed from them, even when they occupy high stations commanding leisure and opportunity. It is elsewhere in the Church that learning, scholarship, and piety are most combined (Davidson 1857:10).

He then pointed out that it would appear that Horne himself held to the same position that Davidson had mapped out and to establish this, Davidson drew the reader's attention to Horne's own words, in the very edition to which Davidson had contributed. Before highlighting this, it will help if it is shown that Horne himself seems to have experienced a degree of development in his position on Inspiration.

In Horne's *Deism Refuted*, published one year after the first edition of his *Introduction*, Horne clearly and unambiguously affirmed that inspiration,

applies not merely to certain parts, but to the whole of these Scriptures; not only to the ideas which they convey, but even to the words by which the ideas are expressed (Horne 1819:31).

Earlier, however, in the first edition of his *Introduction* (1818), while stating much of what was to appear in his, *Deism Refuted*, he did not specifically speak of *verbal* inspiration, but of *plenary* inspiration (Horne 1818:379)--by which he may have meant the same thing. The specificity of the description, however, is lacking in the *Introduction* and this would appear to be deliberate, either in adding this in the later treatise, or in excluding it in the former.

While addressing the very issues that Davidson had resolved, but in a different manner, Horne explains his understanding of inspiration in his

Introduction in the following manner:

The precise nature and extent of this inspiration, indeed, are topics that have been warmly agitated; some contending that the apostles and evangelists were inspired only in those places where they profess to deliver the very

words of God; while in the historical and other passages they ascribe to them no more authority than is due to the writings of well-informed and upright men. It is, however, by no means easy to determine these questions; but this much we may venture to affirm, viz.--That God bestowed upon the apostles such a degree of divine influence, assistance, or guidance, as enabled them to communicate the knowledge of his will to others, without any shadow of uncertainty, mistake, or error, whether the subjects of such communications were then first revealed to those who declared them, or were things with which they were before acquainted (Horne 1818:377-378).

The phrase, "Knowledge of his will," is important to note, because by the tenth edition this has become, "religious knowledge." By the tenth edition Horne now says that God had, "imparted such a degree of divine assistance, influence...as should enable the authors of the Scriptures to communicate *religious knowledge* to others, without error of mistake" (Horne 1869 vol. I:200, I give here the 12th ed. which reads as the 10th.).

Davidson certainly must have recognized this qualifying of inspiration in terms of *religious knowledge* as being his own position. Horne had developed his understanding since his *Deism Refuted*. In fact, by the time of his final edition, he was happy with the following language:

But such a perfect rule we have in the New Testament, if we consider them as under the Spirit's infallible guidance in all the religious sentiments they express, whether he suggested the very words in which they are written or not. Upon this view of the subject, the inspired writings contain a perfect and infallible account of the whole will of God for our salvation, of all that is necessary for us to know, believe, and practice in religion; and what can they contain more than this, upon any other view of it?.... This view of the subject will also readily enable a plain Christian, in reading his New Testament, to distinguish what he is to consider as inspired.... (Horne 1869 vol. 1:534-535).²¹

²¹Cf. also, p. 202, footnote 1 in this edition. This rather dramatic development from a verbal dictation theory, to a limited view of inspiration as involving only religious matters pertaining to salvation, has further interesting elements. These are not the very words of Horne himself, but those he has chosen to quote as offering "conclusions...justly drawn" from his own position "by a late learned and candid writer," whom we discover in a footnote to be Parry, as quoted from his *Inquiry into the Nature and Extent of the Inspiration of the Apostles and Writers of the New Testament*, London, 1797. He also refers to Doddridge and a Bishop Wilson in the same footnote. Also, this detailed

It would appear that perhaps Davidson was not far from the mark in believing that Horne's position was, indeed, very close to his own. But why does Horne say clearly in his autobiography that Davidson advocated "views on the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures...NOT in harmony with my printed statements" (Horne 1862:177)? This is because while Horne had adjusted his view, limiting inspiration as did Davidson, he did not believe, as Davidson did, that the *uninspired* content contained "material error" (Horne 1869:528).

All were correct, however, in assessing Davidson as one who had abandoned the old ecclesiastical dogma of verbal inspiration. That text criticism was decisive for him in abandoning any traditional view of inspiration is evident from the second edition of his *Introduction to the New Testament*, 1882, where we read:

As long as *plenary* inspiration is attributed to the evangelists, it is in the interest of its advocates to find pervading unity in the four gospels--an unity inconsistent with positive or real discrepancies. Those who decry harmonies while advocating plenary inspiration are inconsistent.... The true corrective of harmonies is an honest explanation of the Gospels as the best text criticism presents them. By fair exegesis, ingenious hypotheses of "plenary"...inspiration...appear at once as the inventions of apologists building castles without proper regard to the materials. The castles are built first; and the stones are afterwards shaped with great labour, or with a capricious readiness that forces them into unsuitable positions (Davidson 1882, I:356).

treatment of the subject is now confined to an appendix. Has Horne attempted to escape possible criticism by now relegating the subject to an appendix and by using the words of another, from an earlier age? This is not the case because Horne clearly refers, if only in a footnote, to only those parts of Scripture which "inculcate justice, mercy, and holiness of life.... [as] *the Word of God*," the other portions he refers to as "historical parts," always to be distinguished from the former (202, footnote 1).

Here Davidson was confident that the data produced by textual criticism would simply not allow for a view of scripture that argues that because the entire text is inspired, there can be no contradictions or errors.

Furthermore, Davidson called attention to a technique that would become paradigmatic to those who wanted to retain a verbal view of inspiration while also adopting the critical practice of text criticism, namely, a view that the text of Scripture *is* inerrant, in the "original autographs":

It is timid policy to say, when a real contradiction stares the interpreter in the face, "This could be satisfactorily cleared up, did we know all the circumstances." What is it but saying in effect, "I have a shorter way of getting out of the difficulties than the harmonists? I admit the present inexplicability of passages, but hold that they are perfectly consistent if more light were thrown upon the circumstances, because inspiration excludes the contradiction of Scripture with itself. Perhaps also the text is corrupt; it should be altered, even against authority" (356).

Horne, in looking back on the harm he felt Davidson had caused his own carefully crafted reputation as a son of the Church and stalwart defender of the faith, recorded in his memoirs:

the Rev. Dr. Samuel Davidson (author of several treatises on sacred literature) who altogether ignoring my previous labours in his preface, instead of editing that volume with the really requisite additions and corrections, produced a very large and learned volume of his own; in which his views on the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, were NOT in harmony with my printed sentiments. Much public dissatisfaction having been expressed at this sad dissonance, Dr. Davidson's volume was *severed* from my 'Introduction.' and was sold with a separate title-page to those who approved of his views... (Cheyne: 177).

Horne's daughter added the following commentary on this account:

We need scarcely say that the grief and vexation caused by Dr. Davidson's affair deeply affected my father at this time, and did much to aggravate the disease from which he was suffering. He had often called the "Introduction" "his favourite child," and the mischief which now befell that work was perhaps the greatest misfortune he had ever yet experienced (Cheyne: 178).

Moreover, Davidson's defense of his position did not convince the necessary parties at his college and he was further attacked by two students in a pamphlet titled: *Dr. Davidson: His Heresies, Contradictions, and Plagiarisms by Two*

Graduates, London, 1857. Here again it was Davidson's view of inspiration that was perceived to be at the heart of all his error.

In defense of his views on Inspiration Davidson had called upon Erasmus, Grotius and Le Clerc, those whom I have been arguing were the leading phalanx tending toward the desacralization of the Hebrew-Christian Bible by means of a naturalistic view of its compilation and by a highlighting of its many textual variants, sometimes of significant dogmatic implications. Davidson's critics argued that it was, indeed, Le Clerc, who "is the first to be named" who "entertained opinions more or less loose on the subject of inspiration" (*Two Graduates* 1857:111). Actually, as I have demonstrated, Le Clerc took his views from Erasmus and Grotius. Nevertheless, these critics cite Davidson's nineteenth-century allies on the subject--Alford, Arnold, the Conybeares, Coleridge, et al.--as having influences "of German origin" as though this was reason enough to dismiss them as authorities on the subject. But it has been my contention that the Germans were first liberated from the scholastic position by means of Le Clerc, Locke, Newton, the Antitrinitarians and the English Deists and so the succession of influence is here skewed in this presentation.

Davidson's nemesis, the Rev. John Kelly, who was personally responsible for Davidson's dismissal, added insult to injury by publishing his *An Examination of the Facts, Statements, and Explanations of the Rev. Dr. Samuel Davidson* London, 1857. Davidson's friend attempted to come to his rescue after his removal from the college with a reply. The Rev. Thomas Nichols published his *Dr. Davidson's Removal from the Professorship of Biblical Literature in the Lancashire Independent College Manchester on Account of Alleged Error in Doctrine* London, 1860.

All was in vain as Davidson now relocated in London as Scripture Examiner in the London University, harbouring all the bitterness that such an

experience would naturally engender, while also receiving sympathy from his German colleagues as truly attaining martyr status. He summed up the final London phase of his life in the following terms:

The years of my London life are likely to be the last; and they have been the most favourable to mental culture. During them I have been a free agent, though suffering under the ban of social excommunication from the Congregationalists. But that is no loss. Others, with whom my intercourse has been friendly and instructive, have welcomed me. Liberal theologians of the Established Church...Unitarians...and others have showed me kindness.... But there is a solitariness in the position of him who really belongs to no outward Church or sect. Even large-minded individuals say, "He is not one of us; he is an eclectic and peculiar." An undefined suspicion hovers about him. He represents nobody but himself. The highway to outward success is to be a thoroughgoing Churchman or Dissenter. Stick to your party, and defend it at all times; for if you do so, worldly promotion is likely to follow; but some cannot be party men, and I am one of them (Davidson 1899:86-87).

While text criticism, it cannot be doubted, certainly helped Davidson along on his way to rejecting a sacred view of the text thus also allowing him to accept German criticism, we will now examine how his view of the Trinity was also so influenced by this discipline.

E. Davidson, Textual Variants and the Trinity

At what stage Davidson became a Socinian is not perfectly clear. We read, however, in his diary entry for 24th February, 1888, the following:

In the life of Colenso there is reference to a hymn-book which he compiled, and from which prayer addressed to Christ was excluded, the bishop contending that Paul's epistles present no example of such prayer. A passage (2 Cor. xii. 8) immediately occurred to me, in which the apostle says, "I besought the Lord thrice that it might depart from me,".... When we recollect that Paul looked upon Christ as the heavenly man, as a being who was in the form of God, which is certainly different from consubstantiality and coeternity with God, it is improbable that he should in this one instance speak of himself as praying to Christ. He would have been inconsistent had he prayed to a created being (Davidson 1899:193-194).

Four days later we read that he is still struggling with this theme:

The distinction between Christ and the Father, the supreme God and His Son, which Paul always makes, forbids us to believe that he thought *worship* should be paid to the latter. He was a monotheist (196-197).

Certainly text criticism played a role in his coming to such conclusions, particularly the fresh evidence coming forth from Tischendorf's recensions which reflected the evidence of the earliest uncials of the Greek N.T. Earlier in 1886 he entered the following on 14 March:

This morning I finished the reading of *Luke's Gospel* in the Syriac, and am still convinced that the Peshito version is not a good authority for the original reading of the text. For example, in the concluding chapter it has these additions..."and carried up into heaven" (ver. 51); "and they worshipped him" (ver. 52).... It is remarkable, however, that the oldest and best MSS. 8, A, B, C, have also these later insertions of the 51st and 52nd verses.... Tischendorf has rightly rejected the verse[s], and his note has been copied in part by Westcott and Hort. The so-called Western readings [those of Codex D mostly] are often right, in opposition to the Vatican and Sinaitic MSS. (Davidson 1899:156)²²

Originally, however, as we have already demonstrated Davidson was perfectly orthodox on the dogmas of the Deity of Christ and the Trinity. In Davidson's first publication, *Lectures on Biblical Criticism*, 1839, he dealt extensively with N.T. text criticism. He devoted the entirety of lecture twelve to refuting the idea that "conjectural emendation" should be carried out on the N.T. documents.²³ Here he reflected a very cautious and conservative stance, indeed, when compared to established practice by the end of the eighteenth century.

All of his next lecture was devoted to demonstrating that the *comma Johanneum* was a corrupt interpolation. But nowhere at this stage of his development is there any trace of his entertaining a non-Trinitarianism. His judgement appears to be strictly one resulting from his own personal

²²See also his comments on p. 245.

²³This was conservative, indeed, in light of William Bowyer having raised the practice of conjectural emendation to a high art by the fourth edition of his *Critical Conjectures and Observations on the New Testament* 4th ed. 1812.

investigation of the data and he draws no conclusion regarding the dogma itself having been a late development. In his preface he had already conceded, as had Tregelles, that for the good of the Church,

the dross must be separated from the gold. The spurious must be severed from the genuine. Those adventitious excrescences, sometimes attached to the commonly received text, must be cut off with unsparing hand, as additions of fallible and ignorant men (Davidson 1839:7).

Hence, at this stage he was not using textual criticism as a means of undermining orthodoxy, but rather it was to "cast aside" those "stones in the sacred edifice of divine revelation, inserted by men," in order to enable believers

to gaze on the fair and wondrous temple of the Lord, and to fall down on our knees in lowly adoration before Him, whose loving-kindness and tender mercy are there so richly exhibited in the face of Christ Jesus (7).

This point is confirmed by what proceeds in the next lecture. Lecture fourteen treats the other theologically significant variant at I Tim. 3:16. Here Davidson spends twelve pages rehearsing the evidence and then draws the conclusion that between θεός and ὅς, "θεός is the authentic reading" (Davidson 1839:158).²⁴

The significance of such a judgement, within the recent context of the heated debate over Arianism at the college in Belfast where these lectures were delivered, can hardly be underestimated, since Arians and subordinationists since Erasmus all believed the θεός reading to be an orthodox corruption of the text, one of those "stones, inserted by men."

²⁴While he admitted that the orthodox variant, on its own, offered little *absolute* assistance to Trinitarians for proving their point, here he, nevertheless, affirms his own interpretation of the orthodox reading, recognizing that "It was by *the dignity of his [Christ's] divine nature* that he was able to atone for sin, and to render entire obedience to all the spiritual commands of God" (160). Here we see how perfectly orthodox was Davidson.

In his very next lecture he tackles what had become a real challenge to the orthodox since Priestley's time, the single reference to the virgin birth as found in the early portion of Matthew's narrative. Davidson begins with a resentful tone that such a passage should have to be defended at all because no textual variants appear in the Greek or Latin witnesses:

And yet, it is well known that doubts have been cast on them, as if they did not form a part of inspired Scripture. This is passing strange. Such an outrage against all the genuine principles of criticism is remarkable (186).

Here Davidson reflects in almost Tregelles-like tones, an insistence upon the *external evidence* of documents as always being decisive. In Davidson's judgement,

Unitarians have thrown suspicion on these portions, because they contain an account of the miraculous conception of Christ.... The miraculous conception of our Lord is a doctrine which they cannot reconcile with their ideas of his mere humanity, and hence it must be discarded (186).

It is evident that at this point Davidson's allegiance was firmly on the orthodox side at the college and that his own conviction was that the virgin birth was an historical event, and that to question its authenticity on textual grounds could only proceed from a prejudiced mind.²⁵

On the publication of his *Introduction to the New Testament* in 1848 and in particular the total revision of his work on Biblical criticism, now titled: *A Treatise on Biblical Criticism Exhibiting a Systematic View of that Science* 2 Vols. 1853 (published both in Britain as well as in Boston), a new Davidson begins to emerged as he now draws certain definite conclusions regarding doctrinally important variants.

²⁵No stronger language, in defense of no clearer principle of criticism, can be found in this volume as compared to the following: "Criticism has here nothing to do but to receive with implicit faith these portions as genuine, because they are unquestionably sanctioned by the sources on which it relies for the establishment of a pure text" (187).

The first volume of the *Introduction* had earned him his doctorate from Halle, and here he presents this work to his British readership in these terms:

What the Germans call *Introduction* has not engaged many minds in this country, owing to a variety of causes which it were superfluous to detail. Probably too little attention has been given to theological literature in England. There are few books on it in our language. Every one familiar with the modern works published by theologians and critics in various lands and languages [read Germany and German] knows, that there is no English book which gives a fair or adequate idea of the present state of opinion in this department. The author therefore proposes to supply a want which many doubtless feel; and in regard to which it is not always expedient to direct the young theologian to the most recent publications in Germany (Davidson 1848:v).

Having spent some time in Germany, Davidson was now part of a German network of moderates toward whom he felt both a debt of gratitude, and a sense obligation to uphold a new standard of scholarship within Britain. Tholuck paid him a visit in Manchester 1847 and so the bond with Germany was quick and sure.

In his German-like *Introduction*, Davidson prepared his readers for what they would find there. The contrast is drawn sharply here between the two distinctive academic traits of the two peoples: the Germans, who stress innovation and put a premium on developing new theories; and the British, who tended to want to preserve an ancient orthodox tradition:

The Reader who will sometimes find a different opinion advocated in the *Introduction* from that proposed in the *Lectures* [on Biblical Criticism, 1839], must attribute the change to a more careful examination of evidence. The Writer is not ashamed to alter his sentiments when he sees good reason for doing so. He is unappalled by the charge of inconsistency which may be brought against him. Others may sympathise with the stereotype-minded; *he* cannot do so as long as he inquires and reflects. He adopts the motto of the man who proclaims, *dies diem docet*, rather than the sentiment of him who creeps along all his life in the ruts of hereditary or prevailing opinion (Davidson 1848:viii).

In treating the Baptismal formula at Matt. 28:19 Davidson now argues that it "could hardly appear in Christ," and refers to Strauss as an authority (93). And,

Whether the commission implied so much as should authorise the persons administering baptism to require a distinct profession of faith in the essential unity and coequality of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, is doubtful (94).²⁶

Citing an enormous array of sources on the subject of the virgin birth in Matt., including Priestley, he continues to argue for the apostolicity of the account of the virgin birth in his *first* edition of his *Introduction* (127). But once his completely revised work *An Introduction to the Study of the New Testament* appears in two volumes in 1868, he has done a complete about-face on this point as well. He now maintains that, "Following *internal* [emphasis mine] evidence, we should be disposed to say, that the chapters did not belong to the original copy" (Davidson 1868 1:493).²⁷ It was on the occasion of the publishing of this edition of his *Introduction* that he was formally excommunicated from the Congregational Church and from that time he tells us "I worshipped no more among orthodox Dissenters, but repaired quietly to the Unitarians, and sometimes to the Church of England" (Davidson 1899:95).

Davidson reveals in the final edition of his *Treatise on Biblical Criticism*, 1853, that he is now operating from Griesbach's canon regarding the tendency of scribes to add to the text in support of an orthodox tenet: readings which strongly favour orthodox opinions are now suspicious. Hence, after an extensive twenty-two page treatment of I Tim. 3:16 he now judges that θεός in I Tim 3:16 was a corruption after all, arising from ὅς (Davidson 1853 2:402). For I John v. 7 he spends twenty-four pages in offering a refutation of its authenticity

²⁶Here Horne and Tregelles should have been able to detect a rather significant shift in Davidson's judgements.

²⁷Later still, in his second edition of this work in 1882 he will slightly change his wording to: "did not belong to the original *logia*" (Davidson 1882 1:394). This is because Davidson grants that the account always appeared in the Greek recension but believed it to have been absent in the Aramaic original of Matthew.

on both internal and external grounds concluding that "We believe that internal evidence is *against* the passage as well as the external; and therefore reject the whole as certainly spurious" (Davidson 1853 2:426). Interestingly, he concluded his analysis of the *comma* with a rather lengthy quote from Sir Isaac Newton's treatise. So, too, θεός has been inserted by the orthodox in the fourth verse of Jude's epistle and probably θεός in John 1:18 instead of υἱός (378).

Surprisingly, however, he retains as conservative a stance on conjectural emendations as he did in his earlier *Lectures*:

In the New Testament, critical conjecture has been very little exercised. This is as it should be. There is no need for it there.... We do not believe that the true reading has been lost from all existing documents, in any one instance. The thing is at least very improbable (371).

But the reason for retaining this conservative stance may be more explicable than one might think. Having his conservative friends in mind, he quips,

Difficulty in interpretation [i.e. apparent errors and contradictions] has usually led to them [conjectures]. But it is better to interpret a passage as well as we can, or to confess our inability to explain it, than have recourse to the expedient in question (372-373).

One is reminded here of Davidson's earlier concern with those who were unwilling to admit errors or contradictions in the sacred text; and so here he has excluded conjecture as a legitimate recourse for those who desire to maintain a particular understanding of inspiration.

F. Tregelles and the Second Phase of the Ideology of Harmless Engagement

Not only had Tregelles become incensed that Davidson had used Horne's *Introduction* as a means of communicating German thought to both the conservative establishment ministers as well as to the burgeoning Evangelical dissenters, he continued a running debate with Davidson on other issues, such as the virgin birth. In a lengthy essay appearing in the *Journal of Sacred Literature*

(Vol. 5, no. 9, 1850:1-37), he contested the notion that the earliest and therefore the most authoritative recension of Matthew's gospel in Aramaic should be given priority over the authoritative Greek recension, which, of course, was the argument that Davidson used to dismiss the reference to the virgin birth in Matt.²⁸

Before the debate with Davidson broke out Tregelles had published his diatribe against the seventeenth-century Protestant scholastic stance against the practice of text criticism in his *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament with Remarks on its Revision Upon Critical Principles* London, 1854. Here, in an identical fashion to that of Richard Bentley in his reply to Anthony Collins, Tregelles desires to demonstrate that

Textual criticism was once met by the *à priori* line of argument. It was said that various readings in the text of the New Testament would be contrary to the care of God in preserving it. Is it not irreverent to think that God's Holy Word can have been subject to ordinary casualties? But this high ground of arguing was effectually met by the fact that the various readings *do* exist. No line of proof that a thing *cannot* exist is valid against the simple fact that it *does* exist (Tregelles 1850:17).

Like Bentley, this treatise was Tregelles's way of demonstrating both to high churchmen as well as to Evangelicals of his own rank, that variants have always existed, they have always been acknowledged, and they have always been remedied by means of a fresh revision, which was Tregelles's ultimate goal,

²⁸Although, it should be said that at the time Davidson had not yet made such an argument explicit (in this first edition he merely laid the groundwork for what he would make explicit in his next edition), but a critic of his first edition of his N.T. Introduction drew such a conclusion which Tregelles, ironically, was attempting to refute. But here Tregelles does note that already Davidson was only willing to admit the "virtual inspiration" of the Greek recension while Tregelles clearly argued for its *verbal* inspiration, e.g. p. 36. Tregelles does not in fact abide by Davidson's argument but he finds Davidson's critic even more disturbing for refusing to allow that there was a Hebrew Matthew and this becomes the real focus of his criticism.

again, not unlike Bentley (with the difference being that Bentley never brought his project to fruition). What better way to prepare for the recasting of the text in a fresh revision than to point out in a chronicle the history of resistance to such activity under the rubric of "*An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament*"? A most effective way of disarming one's potential critics.

But would such an account undermine Tregelles's own rather conservative view of *verbal* inspiration which had always accompanied the "*à priori* line of argument" for the special preservation of the sacred text? It would seem he would have to admit that at least part of the text had become corrupted and so preservation as well as verbal inspiration would have been nullified for a time. This was the occasion for him to frankly admit as much and to assert in classic fashion the ideology that Bentley had raised in reply to Collins, namely, the ideology of harmless engagement, that is, no dogma has ever been affected either by textual variants or by the activity involved in sorting them out by way of producing a fresh recension. Rather than see such criticism as a threat, he argued that it was the Divine means of restoring what slight, unimportant corruptions had slipped into the text. But first, he resorted to a most naturalistic line of argument to make his point, thus giving the appearance of entertaining serious paradox, if not irreconcilable contradictions in his thought:

God did not see fit to multiply the copies of his Scripture for the use of mankind by miracle; and just as He left it to the hands of men to copy His Word in the same manner as other books, so was it left exposed to the same changes, from want of skill in copyists, from carelessness or misapprehension, as affect all other ancient writings (Tregelles 1854:37).

So he wants to hold the highest view of inspiration, namely, *verbal* inspiration while arguing that this sacred, verbally inspired text suffered corruption "as affect all other ancient writings" and yet never to the extent that any one dogma is ever so slightly affected! He was keen to remind other dogmaticians that they ought not to argue in terms of "what God *ought* to do in

any particular case" (Tregelles 1850:17), but surely this is just what he has done—he has so qualified what must have happened, in such contradictory terms at that, that his entire argument takes on the same tones of absurdity as his opponents, just a variation on the same theme. How could he say the text was verbally inspired, but yet verbally corrupt? How could he be sure, a priori, that such verbal corruptions never affected dogma, arguing tendentiously that "no point of orthodox truth is weakened, even though supports, which some have thought sustained it, are found to differ from such supposed use and bearing" (Tregelles 1854:234)?

One reason he is faced with such tensions is because of his dissenter-restorationist mentality. Being a Primitivist there is no place for catholic, ecclesiological continuity. Hence, criticism must supply him with final, exclusive and absolute certainty:

Some have, indeed, looked at critical studies as though they were a comparatively unimportant part of biblical learning.... They are the basis on which the visible edifice must rest. The more we regard Holy Scripture...the more shall we be able to estimate the importance of TEXTUAL CRITICISM, by which we know, on grounds of ascertained certainty, the actual *words* and *sentences* of that charter in the true statement of its privileges, and in terms in which the Holy Ghost gave it (Tregelles 1854:viii).

But how would he ever be certain that he had arrived at a certain finality if he had begun with something less than this in the first place? As a critic he argued that the *comma Johanneum* was a late, corrupt interpolation, but was just as adamant that "The *doctrine* is most true, as resting on indubitable warrants of Holy Scripture; but it is not to be proved by citing *as Scripture* that which, if there be any truth in evidence, is no part of Scripture at all" (268). How can he be so dogmatic about a dogma so obviously questionable if only because it required such auxiliary support? He raises the issue of dogmatically significant variants under the heading *Note On Some Passages of Dogmatic Importance* (pp.

226-234), treating both the *comma* as well as I Tim 3:16, without so much as acknowledging Newton's treatise, much less airing his arguments that these variants witness to the lateness of such dogma in the text of Scripture. He well knew the arguments: "The consequence unhappily has been, that the most essential and fundamental truths of Christian doctrine have been supposed by some to rest on uncertain grounds" (234), but he never is at pains to give us the arguments. As such, this work must be judged as propagandistic and ideologically driven to leave the impression that text criticism can only ever lead to a more scientific affirmation of classic orthodoxy. Moreover, it was intended to make the case for an urgent need to revise the Greek N.T. text in order to shore-up this orthodoxy and to offer a defense to counter the rise of German rationalism creeping into the British Isles.

Tregelles spent the years spanning 1857 through 1872 producing his recension of the Greek N.T. in six parts by way of subscription and not until after his death (1875) did the entire work appear with Prolegomena, Addenda and Corrigenda in 1879. This recension was a product of an Evangelical dissenter (who, like Horne had ended his days attached to the Church of England) (Fromow:26) and as such it reflects his own theological agenda. His biographer assessed the significance of his work on the Greek N.T. in terms of his original primitivist instincts:

The especial feature and chief commendation of this edition is its rigid adherence to the hard facts of *evidence* respecting the ancient text of the Scripture.... Other editors have pursued other methods.... Some have gathered those readings which the Church's authority has accredited, preferring them to those of mere antiquity [Scrivener to some extent, but the dominant legacy of the seventeenth century dogmaticians].... (Tischendorf) was so *arbitrary* that each successive edition of his work disturbed his previous texts surprisingly (Fromow:32).

And here we see how by the second half of the nineteenth century at least three major schools of text critical theory were vying for dominance over the

Greek N.T., each with their own sectarian interests: the established, high church party within the Church of England, giving way to catholic instincts; the primitivist-Evangelical non-conformists (Tregelles) and those truly leading the vanguard, the Germans (Tischendorf).

In a review of Tregelles's early parts of his Greek text, a Church of England editor expressed his gratefulness for Tregelles's efforts, noting that they represented a return to England of a discipline which was once the domain and honour of the British Isles, even if it is being carried on by a dissenter:

It is very edifying to note the progress made of late years, both in England and on the Continent, in that department of sacred learning which aims at restoring the text of the New Testament to the condition in which it was left by the inspired Evangelists and Apostles.... Thus completely had this great branch of scriptural knowledge withered in our island, where it had once seemed to take so deep root, as if in its native soil and its proper home.... For ourselves we cannot contemplate the revival (be it ever so late in season) of the science of textual criticism among the countrymen of Walton and Mill and Bentley, without deep thankfulness that God has put it into the hearts of so many of His servants to spend themselves cheerfully on the illustration of His written word, by attempting to restore its very diction.... As English scholars and as English clergymen we heartily welcome the volumes...of Dr. Tregelles too, for if he be scarcely yet among us, [i.e. within the ranks of the established church] he is no longer far from us (Christian Remembrancer 1864:40; 80).

Here we see the nationalistic aspirations that even embrace the activity of a dissenter, believing his labour will tend toward the good of the established Church because it is being conducted by one who "had before him the literary shipwreck of more than one high reputation for Biblical learning, made on the fatal rock of *conjectural emendation*" (55). And here, of course, was a not so veiled reference to the Germans and Tischendorf in particular. Earlier Tregelles was hailed as "accomplishing in the space of the last twenty years at least as much as any one now living, except Tischendorf..." (42). It was inevitable that this name be invoked because Tischendorf's practice of conjecture was *the* link between the apparent safe endeavour of textual, or lower criticism as it was also known at this time--which so suited the factual, common-sense tendencies of the

British--with the rationalistic systems of German *higher* criticism, which the contributors to *Essays and Reviews* would openly advocate in just a few years hence. If Tischendorf was the bridge--howbeit, perhaps unwittingly--Davidson was the gatekeeper and their joint view of inspiration was the gate to this new horizon of Biblical studies.

G. Tischendorf, Inspiration and the Deconstruction of the Second Phase of the Ideology of Harmless Engagement

By the 1860s Tischendorf and his many exploits as archaeologist/palaeographer would not have an equal on British soil until the arrival on the scene of Frederic G. Kenyon with his *The Palaeography of the Greek Papyri* Oxford, 1899. The romantic fascination of that elite company of British scholars and divines obsessed with Biblical manuscript discoveries during this Victorian golden age of imperial archaeological dominance has had no equal in any age, since perhaps the Renaissance itself. Tischendorf was constantly in the religious press and periodical literature of the day, particularly surrounding his discovery and analysis of the oldest uncial of the Greek Bible that had ever been examined outside of the Vatican Library's precious and shrouded, Codex Vaticanus--the famous Codex Sinaiticus, now, ironically, housed in the British Library. The following is only a brief sample: Review of *Travels in the East* by Constantine Tischendorf, *The Eclectic Review* (July-December 1848):553-569; "Codex Sinaiticus," *The Christian Observer* (October 1860):183-187; "The Codex Sinaiticus, and the Adulteress in the Temple," *Christian Observer* (January 1861):441-446; "The Codex Sinaiticus," *Christian Observer* (January 1861):485-489; review of *Bibliorum Codex Sinaiticus Petropolitanus* in *The Christian Remembrancer* (1863):374-402; "Notices--'The Codex Sinaiticus'" *The Christian Remembrancer* (1863):251; "The Codex Sinaiticus," *The Journal of Sacred*

Literature (April 1863):1-16; "The Date of Codex Sinaiticus," *The Journal of Sacred Literature* (July 1863): 448-449; *Ibid.*: 479-499; "Note on the Codex Sinaiticus," *The Theological Review* (1864): 214-222; "The Codex Sinaiticus," *The Journal of Sacred Literature* (April 1865): 108-109; "Tischendorf's Edition of the Vatican New Testament," *The Theological Review* (July 1867):351-362.²⁹

There was even a full-scale controversy as to whether or not the uncial had been forged by an unscrupulous Greek eccentric.³⁰

Some saw Tischendorf's discovery as a further help to the faith of traditional orthodox believers; others saw it as the tangible witness to the beginning of the end of the old orthodoxy. Tischendorf himself saw it as perhaps as something in between. But as the most famous manuscript collector/collator and editor of the Greek N.T. in the second half of the nineteenth century, his opinion carried considerable weight on matters theological.

²⁹This romance with Tischendorf retained its quality well into the next century with works like the English translations of Tischendorf's *Codex Sinaiticus: The Ancient Biblical Manuscript Now in the British Museum* 8th ed., 1934; and Ludwig Schneller, *Search on Sinai: The Story of Tischendorf's Life and the Search for a Lost Manuscript*, 1939, and more recently, Matthew Black and Robert Davidson, *Constantin von Tischendorf and the Greek New Testament* (1981). These have, however, all been eclipsed now by the rather popular but, nevertheless, important study by James Bentley, *Secrets of Mount Sinai: The Story of Finding the World's Oldest Bible--Codex Sinaiticus*, 1986. If one would be tempted to argue with the substance or merit of this work because of its more commercial appearing presentation, it need but be pointed out that no less an authority than James H. Charlesworth, George L. Collord Professor of New Testament Language and Literature, Princeton University, writes the foreword to this work, informative and important in its own right.

³⁰The entire account has been chronicled by J.K. Elliott in his *Codex Sinaiticus and the Simonides Affair* 1982. Cf. also "Miscellanies--Codex Sinaiticus and its Antiquity," *The Journal of Sacred Literature* (April 1863):210-235.

The Unitarian *Theological Review* saw Tischendorf's labour as ultimately helping their cause against establishment orthodoxy. In a series of reviews in the April issue of 1867 they addressed the issue of the implications of the Sinai codex in the following terms:

The excessive stress which the first Protestants laid on a verbally authoritative Scripture, had the effect of casting into undue neglect a large mass of early Christian writings, kindred in subject and aim with our Gospels, which lay outside the recognized canon, and putting them all, without reference to their marked diversity of origin and character, under one sweeping and indiscriminate ban. Anyone who has looked even superficially into the antiquities of the Christian religion, must have discovered traces in every direction of a voluminous evangelical literature, a large portion of which has either perished, or is only to be found in a few scattered fragments; while that part of it which survives, not having been arrested and crystallised in its primitive form, like [that is, for example] our canonical Gospels, has offered a tempting field to the gratuitous embellishments of successive transcribers, and come down in a strangely interpolated condition to our day (*The Theological Review* 1867:149).

The fact that Tischendorf's codex, along with that of Vaticanus, lacked the resurrection account at the end of Mark, the earliest Gospel account, seemed to suggest that this was evidence of a rather major later interpolation indeed. Tischendorf admitted as much in his popular *The Origin of the Four Gospels* (1868):

It is an interesting memorial of the negative school of criticism at the present day, that its representatives, in part at least, take particular pleasure in basing their defense upon just those weighty scripture passages respecting whose *want of authenticity*...leaves no doubt at all. Among such passages may be reckoned the close of Mark's Gospel...(Tischendorf 1868:285).

With such posturing Tischendorf might well seem to be the ideal apologist against his own more radical German opponents, whom he called "the Tübingen fantasy-builder [Strauss] and the Parisian caricaturist [Renan]" (216). Yet, in the same document he himself had admitted that

even prior to the second half of the second century, while copy after copy of our Gospels was made, not only are there many errors of transcribers to be found, but the phraseology and the sense in particular places are changed, and larger or smaller additions are made from apocryphal and oral sources (212).

The ending of Mark is one such addition he explicitly characterizes as "not genuine, but...appended to the accepted text of Mark's Gospel" (211). He is dismissive of the Tübingen school with his flourish of rhetoric, but never bothers to answer the theory predicated on premises he himself accepts. Note the similarity of his construal of how the Gospels were formed, with the words of Renan himself on the same theme:

What is indubitable, in any case, is that very early the discourses of Jesus were written in the Aramean language,³¹ and very early also his remarkable actions were recorded. These were not texts defined and fixed dogmatically. Besides the Gospels which have come to us, there were a number of others professing to represent the tradition of eye-witnesses. Little importance was attached to these writings, and the preservers, such as Papias, greatly preferred oral tradition.... Hence, the little authority which the Gospel texts enjoyed during one hundred and fifty years. There was no scruple in inserting additions, in variously combining them, and in completing some by others.... No compilation was of absolute value.... It was when tradition became weakened, in the second half of the second century, that the texts bearing the names of the apostles took a decisive authority and obtained the force of law (Renan:43-44).

Hence, Tischendorf was something of a mixed blessing as an apologist for English orthodoxy. Nevertheless, in the words of Schweitzer in his *Quest for the Historical Jesus*,

The fact is that in theology the most revolutionary ideas are swallowed quite readily so long as they smooth their passage by a few small concessions. It is only when a spicule of bone stands out obstinately and causes choking that theology begins to take note of dangerous ideas (Schweitzer 1910:37).

Moreover, Tischendorf had a defective view of inspiration, one which he shared with his warmest British supporter, Samuel Davidson. As such Davidson felt a more than significant affinity for Tischendorf and saw him as the more desirable counterpart to Tregelles as a witness to how a critical edition of the Greek N.T. might be constructed.

³¹This may well explain why Tischendorf was reluctant to acknowledge the primacy of an Hebrew original of the Book of Matthew from which it was believed the Greek recension was taken.

To this end Davidson took in hand to produce a modern English translation of Tischendorf's eighth and final, authoritative edition of his Greek N.T., that edition reflecting the evidence of Tischendorf's prized Codex Sinaiticus (*editio octava critica major*). Because Davidson saw such an opportunity as one which would allow him to communicate the valuable textual data found in Tischendorf's recension--not unlike the popular role played by the paraphrases and annotations of the Antitrinitarians in the seventeenth and eighteenth century--and because of his personal love for the established church Bible (the *Authorized Version*),³² he did not want his work to be dismissed because it might be perceived to be a radical departure from the familiar phraseology of the old Bible. Hence, he acknowledges in his *Introduction* that "the present version is founded upon the received one; the deviations being caused by another Greek text and the desire for greater accuracy" (Davidson 1875:ix). In this way he would be giving the highest profile and most popular forum for his friend's years of labour in producing the most critical edition of the Greek N.T. available. And since he knew Tregelles had also been working for years on his own recension of the Greek N.T. and had plans to produce a like translation from this--as can be seen in his 1848 translation of the book of Revelation³³--it

³²On this see his autobiography (Davidson 1899:319) where he says: "...our authorized English Bible of 1611...acquired wonderful rhythm and fluency with choice words of Saxon origin which please the reader's ear. Hence, it is admirably adapted to be the Bible of the people rather than that of the scholar; and in any revision to which it is subjected, the changes should be as few as possible."

³³In this work Tregelles expressed himself on this project in the following terms. They could well be the sentiments of Davidson as well, but with a different textual basis: "I may here briefly state, that I have long felt the importance of putting the English reader of the Word of God into possession of the *results* of textual criticism; and as such criticism supplies just as many corrections of the text of the Book of Revelation alone, as of all the Epistles of

was Davidson's intention to get to the popular mind first with the German's recension in the King's English--in his own words: "The latest critical text of Von Tischendorf is confessedly the best." It appeared in published form in 1872, the same year as Tregelles's final fascicle to his edition which contained the book of Revelation. The labour of fifteen years on Tregelles's part would quickly become completely eclipsed, however, by Tischendorf's, before Tregelles's final completed form, with *prolegomena*, appeared posthumously in 1879, by which time it was well dated right from the press.

Here Davidson takes opportunity to criticise other attempts to produce a critical English translation at about this time but finds them all wanting in one degree or another. He also takes the occasion to rehearse how Trinitarians resisted evidence that would strip them of their most vital proof texts, the *comma Johanneum* and I Tim. 3:16 and points out that the Germans again were well in advance of the English in dispensing with these doctrinally motivated interpolations in the person of Griesbach as early as the turn of the century. Moreover, in a Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*-like recounting he highlights the abuse Griesbach and others took for excising these passages, triumphantly acknowledging that "it was impossible to stop the progress of sound criticism by unfounded assertions or pointed suspicions" (xxviii). Reflecting further he adds,

We ourselves can remember some of the combats waged over the word [θεός]; the republication of Sir Isaac Newton's observations upon it, and the rejoinder it called forth under the title, "Sir Isaac Newton and the Socinians foiled in the attempt to prove a corruption in the text, I Timothy iii.16." Happily this kind of warfare is also past. When orthodoxy and heterodoxy come into close collision, calm reasoning necessarily suffers (xxviii).

Paul taken together, it became a matter of manifest importance that *this book* should be given to the English reader on the basis of the best authorities" (Tregelles 1881:X).

Davidson wastes no opportunity to contrast Tischendorf's German scholarship with that of his native, established churchmen's efforts:

Von Tischendorf's note on the diversities of reading here [Acts xx.28] is an excellent example of critical fullness and fairness, contrasting very favourably with the reasonings of Dean Alford in his Greek Testament, which are weak and perverted (ibid).

Davidson concluded his introductory essay bemoaning the fact that his dear friend did not live to see the finished product. Nevertheless, Davidson

...indulges the hope that Von Tischendorf may be pleased even now with the thought that the Greek text over which he spent many toilsome years circulates in the English tongue, bearing the sacred words current in the church of the third century into the dwellings of the humble, putting the plain reader on the same platform with the scholar, and inspiring him with confidence in records whence he draws the sustenance of the soul (xlv).

Here Davidson no doubt felt a sense of considerable satisfaction in knowing he had, indeed, become the conduit for communicating critical (German) scholarship to the man in the street in much the same way that Erasmus had in his age, and the English antitrinitarian paraphrases had in theirs. The difference was that Davidson lived in that vital age that saw its official recognition.

It was in the American journal, *The Presbyterian Quarterly and Princeton Review*, that Tischendorf chose to counter the pre-critical element yet remaining in those in the English-speaking world who looked to him as a foe of the extremes in German scholarship.³⁴

Significantly, the essay was titled: "Have We the Genuine Text of the Evangelists and Apostles?" (Tischendorf 1874:604-618). He begins by admitting that interpolations were added to the text early in the second century

³⁴Ironically, however, although Tischendorf dismisses the possibility of the original Gospel of Matthew having been composed in Hebrew, his more conservative counterpart, Tregelles, celebrated the fact vociferously as a antidote to certain obscurantist elements within British Christianity (Tischendorf:605).

and that at times from "dogmatic arbitrariness" (610). This was because, "...from the beginning these writings were not considered as literary works, whose verbal literalness was of the highest importance" (610). This will have significant implications later in the essay as he addresses the primary theme of the essay, namely, inspiration in relation to the activity of text criticism. For now, however, ironically, he sees these potentially damning concessions that ran contrary to the highest and most traditionally conservative view of things, as having a "*very* welcome, important, and indeed *apologetic* side" (emphasis mine) (609). Here he masterfully turns a liability into a not insignificant asset! This is because it proves that the composition of the core of the apostolic material must have had an early genesis for such corruptions to have been introduced so early.

He then maintains that contrary to catholic instincts towards the concept of *continuity*, Protestants, from his vantage point, must be the supreme *primitivists* in the realm of textual criticism:

As opposed to the Romish traditional church Protestantism has its true Palladium in the Scripture; therefore to Protestantism conspicuously is the genuineness and correctness of the text of the Scripture of the greatest importance. To strive with all the means of science for the restoration of the sacred text is one of the highest duties of Protestantism (611).³⁵

Here, with but one stroke, Tischendorf is able to by-pass the catholic element in Protestant scholastic/dogmatic tradition and project a Protestantism coloured by an expression, severe in the extreme, of the principle of *sola Scriptura*. This was conveniently suited to appeal, most naturally, to both

³⁵It must be kept in mind, however, that for Tischendorf this argument was not driven by the theoretical belief that the autographs were either "*inerrant*," or necessarily recoverable, verbatim, as it was for the American Princetonians (in whose journal this essay was strategically published). For these Americans such convictions were the emerging ideology that would become the dominant paradigm for American fundamentalists of all stripes, liberating them to happily engage the practice of text criticism (on this see Letis 1991:175-190).

nineteenth-century German rationalist impulses, as well as to the simplicity of pious American and English Evangelicalism.³⁶

He reminds his readers that he sits at the very pinnacle of manuscript investigations in this age of rapid discovery and change and from this unique vantage point made the decision to produce a critical edition of the Greek N.T., founded, of course, on his own prized manuscript discovery, the Codex Sinaiticus. He differs again, however, from his Evangelical audience by making no claim to restore the *autographic* form of the text, but merely that form which existed in the second half of the second century. He did not, in fact, hold to an optimism that necessarily led him to believe that an original text could be reconstituted, admitting that "Should it be impossible to attain [the text as "originally written"] still the task would at any rate be ours to approximate as closely as possible to the primitive form of the text" (Tischendorf 1868:203).

And if this was found to be worrisome to his nervous readers, Tischendorf engaged the calming rhetoric of the ideology of harmless engagement, so successfully employed by Bentley, and again exactly twenty years earlier by his English Evangelical counterpart (Tregelles), in his *An Historical Account*. In each case, the rhetoric was intended to prepare the ground for the introduction of each editor's own recension of the Greek Testament. In Tischendorf's words, "To be sure the differences [between the ecclesiastical recensions and his critical text] are in the great part only of a grammatical nature, and concern nothing of

³⁶As such his rhetoric of disapprobation regarding the ecclesiological dimension was well suited to both American tastes and to the sentiments of British non-conformists: "Shall we now, in this state of the question, remain quiet, in spite of the consciousness that in our text of the New Testament we follow only ecclesiastical custom, only usage, even though it be ancient usage?" (611).

historic or dogmatic importance" (613). This was--as were the two former applications-- question-begging, since the very goal of this essay was to dispose of the dogma that the text was verbally inspired; but more than this, the claim itself was nothing if not disingenuous, as we will demonstrate in turn.

Moreover, in almost Priestley-like terms, he then reminds his readers that even if certain passages, such as the woman taken in adultery, are dispensed with as inauthentic (though possibly a true account), and other significant passages are now judged to have also been of the same quality, such as the account of the angel at the pool of Bethesda (Jn. 5:4); the phrase referring to Jesus as "the Son of God" (Mk. 1:1); the account of Jesus's ascension in Luke's Gospel and Mark's, they can all be gladly dispensed with because "pious affection and believing prejudice must be sacrificed to the furthering of exact knowledge, to the interest of truth" (615). Besides, "Does not the Evangelical, the Apostolic truth gain in authority, in credibility, if the written text on which it rests comes forth unhurt from the use of the sharp critical knife?" (613). Here again, this judgement must be seen as problematically question-begging.

He does finally concede what his readers must now be thinking, i.e., he has perhaps overstated his ideological belief that the loss of these passages is a matter of dogmatic indifference. But he reassures them that, yes, these passages may well "be as little indifferent to the Christian reader as to the learned investigator," particularly when it means "that not one of the Gospels (not even Mark) recorded this event [of the ascension]." But if we lose such narratives we retain the dogma because "the wonderful parting of the Lord from the earth remains a postulate of the Christian faith" (614). This is because we still have one account, though now the evidence might be seen to be a bit threadbare, in that given to us by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles, even if this is now reduced exclusively to

a *second hand* account, "entirely dependent on the earliest traditions, those of the Apostle's time" but given by one who "was not an eye witness" (614).

Finally, he comes to the two classic christological passages we have been treating throughout this study, I Tim 3:16 and the *comma Johanneum*. As to the former, "the Apostle did not write, as stands in Luther's Bible, 'God was manifest in the flesh,' but 'who was manifest in the flesh'" (617). No alarm should be taken at this orthodox corruption, however, because

The divine sonship of Christ is not thereby placed in any doubt in the Pauline epistles, for the Apostle placed this very often in the clearest light, especially in the Epistle to the Colossians; but this passage in Timothy can no longer avail to prove that Paul called the Saviour "God" (617).

Unitarians would find this wording quite acceptable since they fully accepted Christ's divine sonship, but firmly believed that the notion that Christ was co-eternal God was a fabrication of the early Nicene Christianity.

Regarding the *comma* "All of these words are, beyond doubt, spurious" and unlike the "fickle Erasmus" "Luther never received them into his Bible" and yet he retained the dogma of the Trinity" (617).³⁷

I conclude this analysis of Tischendorf's essay by addressing his final theme, what I believe to be the thesis of his treatise: the invalidity of the dogma of verbal inspiration. I will then draw some concluding implications from the textual adjustments for which he was calling.

³⁷This, of course, was because Luther was a catholic, bound to ecclesiastical and creedal orthodoxy, and *not* a primitivist. Hence, he could, indeed, dispense with the passage without raising the issue of the consequence for the dogma. Whereas, ironically, Erasmus, as a primitivist, could place it back into his Greek recension, provide the *evidence* for its spuriousness, and thereby actually provide the occasion for demonstrating how the dogma of the Trinity was interpolated into the text of Scripture at a late date while yet formally retaining the passage to placate his critics.

He raises the issue that all the Princetonians at this time would have been bound to, namely, a verbal view of inspiration, and asks the question directly: is the church correct "in assuming the divine verbal inspiration of Scripture"[?]. In putting the question just this way he admits two vital points: namely, that there was at least a general ecclesiastical consensus as to how inspiration was to be understood, a recognizable paradigm with which orthodoxy had been working up until this time; and, that this consensus was a verbal view of inspiration.

In answer to his own question his entire preceeding essay was but prolegomena bringing him to just such an answer:

After all this, may it not be asked: How can the Scripture be verbally inspired, when it is still a task, and moreover one so difficult, to establish the genuine, true text? when it requires so many old documents, such clearing of the dust from forgotten cloister corners, and in addition, courage to oppose all conservative prejudices with results which disturb the quiet of possession? (618)

Surely the radical, anti-ecclesiastical element³⁸ in the author is now without pretence of innocence or disinterested academic discourse: there is here the air of an activist set on altering the theological, religious view of the sacred text by application of the details and inferences of the modern, scientific practice of text

³⁸This can be seen not only in his expressed conviction that it was ecclesiastical resistance to the autonomy of textual research based on the dogma of verbal inspiration that prevented full acceptance of the earliest textual evidence, but it is also acutely highlighted by his dismissive attitude towards the monks of St. Catherine's' monastery. It is now clear that he stole the Codex Sinaiticus from the monks and then fabricated the story that in their culpable ignorance they were burning it for fuel. As Bentley suggests, this "seems...hardly likely to be true" (Bentley 1985:87), and was rather a story designed "to depict the monks of St. Catherine's as little better than idiots" (86). In Charlesworth's opinion, "...these monks have been abused by western imperialism; they deserve our long overdue support and deep respect"(5), but in the opinion of the monks themselves they certainly deserve more, namely, the return of their rightful property, the Codex Sinaiticus!

criticism. Here we have a sermon coming out of nineteenth-century Germany giving notice to the Anglo-Saxon world that their time of pre-critical naiveté is now over. And, having been written a year before he died and delivered in the following year, this "sermon" carried a particular urgency and poignancy.

In fact, this sentiment is almost analogous to Strauss's emphasis on the necessity of demythologizing the Christian message for its very survival and usefulness in the modern era.³⁹ For Tischendorf, to attain "the textual establishment of the Apostle's writings, on which so much rests" we must see Providence as now dictating that for "the right understanding of Christianity" we must understand this goal is bound up inextricably with "a serious task of Science." This task of science is now a new "religious task" replacing "old ecclesiastical *usage*" (emphasis mine), i.e. "the traditional text" (618). With the exchange of the concept of Providence working in the Church, for a new direction of Providence working amongst those now scientifically determining the text, we also have an exchange of the theological significance of the sacred text from one once thought to be verbally inspired, to an understanding that "The letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life." Once the paradigm exchange is complete then we will have the capacity to see these new manuscript discoveries "like the revived dead" who "open their eyes, and raise their voice in witness to the old misinterpreted truth" (618).

That Tischendorf's aim was detected by the editors is made strikingly evident by a concluding note at the foot of the page at the conclusion of the essay where the editors add: "While errors in the received text should be

³⁹Cf. the final section of Strauss's *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, "Relation of the Critical and Speculative Theology to the Church."

searched out and corrected, we do not think this affects the question of verbal inspiration" (618). This is truly a remarkable statement. All the evidence and arguments Tischendorf employed clearly pointed to the opposite conclusion; and yet the editors published his treatise. This merely illustrates how important Tischendorf's reputation was at the time.

In an eclectic fashion it was thought that Tischendorf's textual evidence could be used with impunity, justifying amending of the text--which would at least demonstrate that the Princetonians were not obscurantists on the matter--without needing to draw all his conclusions or inferences. This is because the Princetonians were, indeed, convinced that text criticism *was* now Providence's means of restoring the N.T. text; but they retained a rather naive dimension to the equation, namely, that the very *ipsissima verba* would, in time, be restored and that this form of the text would be *verbally* inspired and *inerrant* in every way. Hence, if Tischendorf's data could further this cause then his problematic German defects could be tolerated.

What Tischendorf did not make explicit in this essay and what the Princetonians were perhaps incapable at any rate of detecting, was that the textual alterations required by Tischendorf's recension were much more significant dogmatically than even he was willing to hint at in this forum.

Strauss, in his later, more popular *A New Life of Jesus* 2 Vols. (London, 1879), had used the missing ending of Mark as evidence that the myth of the resurrection was a later theological reflection on the actual, naturalistic historical events:

And when Mark at this point [chapter 16] (ver. 9), as if neither the resurrection of Jesus nor any information about it had been given to the Magdalene with the other women, all at once goes on to say, that when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene--this mode of beginning over again in the middle of the narrative

is certainly strange enough to lead us to give all attention to the circumstances that the concluding section of Mark (xvi. 9-20) is wanting in two of the best MSS. of the gospels, and was, according to statements of great antiquity, wanting in several others which are no longer extant (Strauss 1879:405).

Renan was also careful to draw attention to this:

For the historian, the life of Jesus finishes with his last sigh. But such was the impression he had left in the hearts of his disciples and of a few devoted females, that during some weeks more it was as if he were living and consoling them.... Let us just say, however, that the strong imagination of Mary Magdalen played in this circumstance an important part....⁴⁰ This is obvious, especially in the ninth and following verses of chap. xvi of Mark. These verses form a conclusion of the second Gospel, different from the conclusion at xvi. 1-8, with which many manuscripts terminate (Renan:328; footnote 3).

Moreover, James Charlesworth has highlighted the significance of the longer ending of Mark for current *Leben-Jesu Forschung*:

Today Biblical scholars know that we are far from possessing the original manuscripts written by the New Testament authors. Even the manuscripts we do have it is well to remember that all the gospel manuscripts contain errors...some mistakes were...deliberate alterations due to changes in doctrinal or theological beliefs.... Tischendorf was obsessed with finding a manuscript of the Bible which was pure and authoritative and so I can imagine the intense excitement he experienced when he beheld the revered treasure [Sinaiticus] and began reading it alone at night.... Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Syriacus, Codex Vaticanus and Codex Bezae Cantabrigiae do not contain the last twelve verses of the Gospel of Mark. This is a notable omission: it is these verses only which contain the description of Jesus' resurrection appearance. Since Mark's account seems to be not only the earliest but also that on which Matthew and Luke based their accounts, a question arises: What is the basis for the accounts of Jesus' bodily resurrection according to Matthew, Luke and John? (Bentley 1985:5-6).

Finally, one last note on Tischendorf's assurance that though the apparent first-hand account of the ascension at the end of Luke's Gospel was no longer to be regarded as authentic we, nevertheless, still had a valid second-hand account in the first chapter of Acts. Tischendorf would be hard pressed to retain his optimism today. Eldon J. Epp has discovered that this account as well is missing

⁴⁰Renan goes into further detail on this theme in his other related work, *The Apostles*.

in certain of the old Latin witnesses. After providing the data for this Epp concludes with the following question:

...if the 'Western' text *were* the original text of the Gospels and Acts (or even Luke-Acts alone)--an issue quite beyond the scope of this paper--could it then not be argued with considerable persuasion that the notion of the ascension of the risen Christ as a visible transfer from earth to heaven was only a secondary and later development in early Christian thought? (Epp 1981:144-145).

H. Summary

If Strauss was correct that "the true criticism of dogma is its history," surely the emerging significance of the *lower* criticism of the Greek New Testament was the nineteenth-century's most decisive and scientific contribution to that history. In providing the surest means for viewing the text of the New Testament through the lens of a serious historical consciousness, rather than as a sacred text, the lower criticism proved to be a significant problem for faith communities since the beginning of the age of the printed book.

The full naturalistic implications of the discipline were successfully resisted for the most part first by the Protestant/Roman Catholic dogmatic framing of the evidence by an appeal to Providence working through the Church in authenticating and preserving the *ipsissima verba* of Revelation in the ecclesiastical recensions. With the dawning of the English Enlightenment a slight adjustment took place and the lower criticism was now starting to be viewed as the new realm of providential activity for shoring-up the sacred text in the few places suffering unimportant corruptions. By the Victorian era it was no longer possible for this ideology of harmless engagement to project with certainty that no dogma was affected by the evidence of the lower criticism, nor to withstand

the inexorable movement from the historical data of the lower criticism to the theoretical framework of the higher criticism.⁴¹

⁴¹This is not to say that the effort was no longer made to continue projecting the ideology of harmless engagement. Fenton John Anthony Hort would attempt it one last time in his *Introduction* (1881). I have addressed this in the introduction to this dissertation.

Conclusion

Patrick Lambe, whose essay "Critics and Skeptics in the Seventeenth-Century Republic of Letters," proved to be a great stimulus to my own research, observed in the conclusion to his work:

Of course, confessional and ecclesiastical politics, and Enlightenment *philosophes* significantly affected the development of biblical criticism, but they did so within a broader cultural context. Only by illuminating this context can one understand why the political, confessional, and dogmatic forces at play had the effects they did. Within this framework, more work needs to be done on the biblical scholarship of the time, on the ways in which popular conceptions of the bible were shaped and changed, and on the implications of these developments for theological understandings of issues such as revelation and inspiration (Lambe 1988:295).

This dissertation has been an attempt to make just such a contribution by attending to the following theme. A religious belief in verbal inspiration gave the Christian Bible its sacred text status within the matrix of the Church. The *lower*, or textual criticism, first practiced outside the sanction of the Church by Erasmus and developed further by non-Trinitarians initially, offered the first significant direct challenge to this belief in the early modern period. This, I have argued, was the proper beginning of the process of desacralization.

Moreover, it was argued that the desacralizing role of the lower criticism was further manifested when it was discovered that certain theologically significant passages, perceived by those in the Erasmian school to have resulted from later interpolation into the text of Scripture, illegitimately lent support to dogmas such as the Trinity, the deity of Christ and the virgin birth. The practice of lower criticism set in motion, well before the arrival of the higher criticism, a rather significant awakening of a historical consciousness about the developmental stages of the N.T. text, which in later recensions reflected a more full-blown orthodox expression of christological themes. The role that the lower

criticism played in introducing this historical consciousness has not been readily acknowledged by either historians, or practitioners of the discipline of lower criticism.

I have argued that this is because of an ideological framing of the historical details of the discipline in development. Once this ideological component and the historical circumstances prompting it were brought into relief, two schools responding in two ways to the data of the lower criticism clearly emerged: one interpreting the data as affecting dogma, the other interpreting the data as not affecting dogma. Hence, it becomes a little clearer why later in the Victorian era one man's *development* (John Henry Newman) could be another man's *corruption* (Newman's Unitarian brother, Francis).

For non-Trinitarian Biblical critics, textual variants were always the clearest evidence that certain dogmas thought to be biblically based, did not match the earliest stratum of the biblical texts, namely, the dogmas of the Trinity, the deity of Christ, and the virgin birth. Because certain orthodox divines had an ideological resistance to such arguments--though they too may have wanted to practice the lower criticism, but within the confines of their ideological commitments--they were able to dismiss the often genuine critical instincts of the Antitrinitarians as merely the result of sceptics offering a self-serving, tendentious treatment of the evidence.

Once the Bible lost its sacred text status, primarily because of the data of the lower criticism, this dissertation argued, only then did the German project of the higher criticism, or the quest for the historical Jesus, within the alien context of the nineteenth-century university, attempt to discover a *new* religious significance for the Bible. This was, in a very real sense, an attempt to compensate for the loss of the sacred text paradigm, with a reconstructive view of the Bible as being, however naturalistic, nevertheless, still a religious text. The

higher criticism, however, was a late development attempting a redemptive exercise of reconstruction, while religiously speaking, the lower criticism was the original means of desacralizing the Bible.

This theme was elucidated by returning to Erasmus as the progenitor of a primitivist or restorationist impulse in the early modern catholic tradition. While he was not always the primary inspiration for all dissenting traditions he certainly was found to be one early and pervasive influence among Antitrinitarians.¹

I next treated how both the Roman catholics and the Protestant catholics replied to Erasmus's quest for the *historical* text by affirming the sacred text status of the *ecclesiastical* editions sanctioned by ecclesiastical use. For Tridentine catholics the sacred text was the *Vulgata Latina*. For the Protestant catholics this was the Greek N.T. recension of the Eastern catholic tradition and the Hebrew Bible of the synagogues. It was left to the Socinian/Arian dissenting traditions to carry forward Erasmus's quest for the historical text.

¹Irena Backus disputed the validity of Antitrinitarians employing Erasmus to such ends in her essay "Erasmus and the Antitrinitarians" (Backus 1991:53-66), but she does so by saying those Antitrinitarians who looked to Erasmus as their source of inspiration or authority could only do so in a tendentious manner. Her study failed to recognize it was precisely Erasmus's *philological* judgements and his exegesis that were decisive for the Antitrinitarians, not his rhetorical techniques used to reconcile these judgements with official ecclesiastical dogma. Because she shows no acute awareness of the implications of Erasmus's actual text critical work, particularly the importance of the *comma Johanneum* and I Tim. 3:16, nor of the steps involved in its progressive appropriation, from Grotius to the Cambridge Platonists, to the Antitrinitarian Newtonians, it should appear from this study (and that of Coogan 1992) that the narrow limits of her treatment did not give her as clear a picture of the overall impact of Erasmus on the Antitrinitarians as it might have otherwise done.

I next addressed the specific use of textual variants by the eighteenth-century Antitrinitarians. I began with how Jean Le Clerc's highlighting of the evidence of variants introduced a crisis of credibility during the English Enlightenment for the proponents of the Protestant dogmatic view of verbal inspiration. I then gave treatment to Isaac Newton's pivotal work discovering *Two Notable Corruptions*, one each found in the Eastern catholic Greek N.T. (sanctioned by the Protestants), I Tim. 3:16; and in the *Vulgata Latina* (sanctioned by Trent), the *comma Johanneum*, I John 5:7-8..

Coming as it did from the premier scientist of the English Enlightenment, both in its early MS form amongst a small circle of Newtonians and in its later published form, Newton's treatise provided Antitrinitarians with a boldness to plead their case for religious tolerance. Here I also provide the context that explains the rise of the ideology of harmless engagement advocated by Richard Bentley as a response to both deistic sceptics and Antitrinitarian critics as well.

I followed on to illustrate how Newton's data were variously unknown, accepted, rejected, or ignored by Antitrinitarians or catholics within thirty different editions of English Biblical annotations and paraphrases from the sixteenth century through the eighteenth century. Here, I argued, within these annotations/paraphrases—a tradition begun by Erasmus to offer a simple and popular hermeneutic—was where the real battle was fought for allegiance to either the received system of christological orthodoxy, or to the argument that such orthodoxy had been illegitimately interpolated into the text of Scripture based on the paradigmatically significant variants such as Newton had treated in c.1690. Here was yet another and important forum for Antitrinitarians to argue that the established Church had a questionable Biblical basis for their intolerant stance toward Antitrinitarians.

I then proceeded to make a connection between these important Enlightenment developments stemming from the data of textual variants to the work of the most formidable Unitarian in English history, Joseph Priestley. I demonstrated how, once the doctrine of verbal inspiration was rejected, as primarily the result of the evidence of the lower criticism, the text of Scripture now invited a more thoroughgoing naturalistic treatment to account for the supernatural element found within its narratives. Again, the *comma Johanneum* played a significant role in opening the possibility to consider corruptions in the text for which there yet remained no clear MS evidence, only patristic evidence alone.

It was Priestley who first used conjectural emendation to suggest that the dogma of the virgin birth was the result of a later interpolation as found in the genealogy of Matthew. This in turn inspired other Unitarians, such as Hennell, to then suggest that *all* Biblical supernatural events were to be understood not as history but as myth, thus launching the true quest for the historical Jesus nearly simultaneously with that of the German Strauss.

In my concluding chapter I continued the treatment of my theme into the Victorian era. I argued that while the non-conformist Evangelical, Tregelles, made a gallant effort to once again take up Bentley's argument for the harmless engagement of lower criticism, it was Samuel Davidson (who would eventually become an Antitrinitarian) and the German Constantine Tischendorf who together would once again highlight for the Victorians what was made evident to those of the Newtonian Enlightenment: the lower criticism will no longer allow for a verbal view of inspiration (Tischendorf), and the *comma Johanneum* and I Tim. 3:16 are evidence that dogmatic elements have, indeed, been interpolated into the text of Scripture (Davidson), thus prompting the call for

the quest for the historical text to now blossom forth in an unrestrained quest for the historical Jesus.

Postscript

While J.C.D. Clark has highlighted the impact of Antitrinitarian social and political influences in his *English Society 1688-1832* (1985), and Raymond Holt contributed a major work treating *The Unitarian Contribution to Social Progress in England* (1938), and H. McLachlan produced his *The Unitarian Movement in the Religious Life of England: Its Contribution to Thought and Learning* (1934), precious little has been produced treating Antitrinitarian contributions to the development of Biblical criticism.² This did not begin as a treatise taking up such a theme but it soon emerged as decisive for understanding the role lower criticism played in influencing dogma from 1690-1854. Raymond Holt was correct when he said:

Unitarians have been leaders in most of those changes which have transformed the England of the eighteenth century into the England of the present day [1937]. Towards the middle of the nineteenth century they thought of themselves as "the Vanguard of the Age" (Holt 1938:13).

And so they had every right to think of themselves, particularly in the field of Biblical criticism. In 1808 the Unitarians finally gave the English-speaking world a Bible, the *Improved Version New Testament*, based on Bishop Newcome's earlier translation, which reflected the then current state of New Testament textual criticism as found in the critical edition produced by the German Griesbach (1775-7). While it had many problems and was naturally severely

²The rare exception is J. Estlin Carpenter's *The Bible in the Nineteenth Century* (1903).

criticised, by orthodox and Unitarian alike,³ it nevertheless anticipated what would become the universally recognized textual standard for the future.

This Unitarian version was seen to be such a threat, however, that the Rev. C.A. Moysey dedicated his Bampton lectures to the task of refuting both it and the Unitarians in his *Doctrines of the Unitarians Examined, as Opposed to the Church of England* (1818). His perception of their contribution to providing a critical edition of the Scriptures in English was anything but fair. In light of subsequent events the following criticism appears typical of how orthodox clergy of the established church regarded anything "critical" coming from an Unitarian source:

The Unitarians profess general belief in the Scriptures.... But they object to the "plenary inspiration" of them.... because, in disavowing the inspiration of the Bible, they open a way, as they imagine, for the rejection, or alteration, or mutilation, of any texts of Scripture which militate most strongly against their system (Moysey 1818:165).

Professor Nares, Regius Professor of modern history in Oxford had a similar perception:

It has fallen in my way of late to know more than I knew some time ago, of the extraordinary zeal and industry with which the *Unitarians* are endeavouring to bring the *Improved Version* into notice; recommending it from their pulpits, and in all periodical works with which they are connected, in the strongest manner, not only as a more correct translation of the written word of God, but as tending to *do away* [with] "many *sources* of error," and to enable the world to "form *just* ideas of *true* and *uncorrupted* Christianity."... The present edition is set forth as an *Improved* version of the New Testament, formed on a *particularly correct text*, with an intent to *get rid of certain doctrines*, as palpable corruptions of Christianity; *implying* certainly, that an *improved* Version and *corrected* text, were *wanting* for these purposes (Nares 1814:xix; xxvii).

³On the orthodox side of the question see Edward Nares *Remarks on the Version of the New Testament Edited by the Unitarians* (2nd ed. 1814); on the Unitarian side see Lant Carpenter *Examination of the Charges made against Unitarians and Unitarianism, and the Improved Version by the Right Rev. Dr. Magee* (1820).

That the ecclesiastical world did, in fact, take notice of the textual decisions made by the Unitarians and eventually took in hand to "improve" the established Church's Bible in 1881, with a Unitarian sitting on the revision committee, was surely the most significant indication possible that the Antitrinitarians' long campaign had not been in vain. In this *Revised Version* edition, both I Tim. 3:16 and the *comma Johanneum* were treated precisely as Erasmus had hinted they ought to be: θεός was expunged from the text and the *comma* was now removed without so much as a note to signal that it was ever there.

Moreover, with the repeal of the *Test and Corporation Acts* (1828), along with the tolerance they desired, the Antitrinitarians saw with the arrival of the *Revised Version* N.T. fifty-three years later, the triumph of critical endeavour over institutionalised intransigence and the vindication of a process of thought and practice that can only be fully understood as the triumph of Erasmianism.

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